

# Acknowledgements

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C.F.B.

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# doorway to response

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The Role  
of Clergy  
in Ministry  
with  
Battered  
Women



Edited by  
Carol Findon Bingham



Illinois Interfaith Committee Against Domestic Violence  
a committee of  
Human Services Ministries Consortium

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# Introduction

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Domestic violence, or woman abuse, is a hidden evil which lurks behind every other door in every locale, town or city. It has traditionally been minimized, trivialized or denied outright. Theologian Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite says, "All day long, every day, women are verbally intimidated, battered, injured, and killed by men they live with. If, as Susan Brownmiller said, 'rapists are the shock troops of patriarchy,' then batterers are the army of occupation." It has only been in the last few years, through the battered women's movement, that the full extent of the very serious and pervasive nature of domestic violence has come to light.

Yet despite greatly increased publicity and public awareness, many people are unaware of how many women are abused by their husbands or male partners. This may be especially true among religious leaders and laity, who find it difficult to believe that otherwise faithful members of their churches or synagogues are involved in violent relationships at home. It is easier and more comforting to think that such problems exist only among families outside of the faith, for how could persons who have accepted the Word of God abuse members of their own families?

There are several myths about woman abuse which are commonly believed by many members of society:

- 1) **MYTH** Woman abuse does not happen very often, and when it does occur it takes place among some "different" group.

**FACT** Half of all married women will be struck once by their husbands, and in one fourth of all intimate male/female relationships there is repeated physical violence by the man against the woman.

Domestic violence occurs in all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and religious groups. It knows no boundaries relative to class, income or background. It is especially important, although very disturbing, to realize that violence is part of the family life of many faithful, churchgoing couples.

- 2) **MYTH** Just as many men as women are abused by their partners.

**FACT** In 95 percent of all cases of adult partner abuse, the man batters the woman. This is true for a variety of reasons, the most important one of which is that historically, culturally and religiously, men have been regarded as the head of the household and women as subservient to them. Many men believe that they have every right to enforce their demands and to "discipline" their wives through the use of physical violence.

- 3) **MYTH** Domestic violence is not very serious when it does happen.

**FACT** Domestic abuse is the single largest source of injury to women, exceeding automobile accidents, rapes and muggings combined. The violence almost always increases in both frequency and severity over time, and very often leads to homicide. According to the FBI, approximately 40 percent of all female murder victims in this country are killed by the men who supposedly loved them, usually after being beaten by those men for years. About one quarter of all battered women report first being beaten while pregnant, and about 10 percent miscarry as a result of beatings during pregnancy.

- 4) **MYTH** What goes on within a family is nobody else's business.

**FACT** Violent crime is everybody's business. We should not tolerate in our homes the harmful, hurtful and dangerous behavior which we have outlawed in public places. Victims of domestic violence need our support and assistance, and abusive men should be held accountable for violating criminal laws.

Furthermore, we are all affected by violence within families, because children who are the victims of abuse or who witness violence by one family member against another are at much greater risk of growing up to be violent adults, and to suffer from other kinds of problems. Over 80 percent of men incarcerated for violent crimes grew up in violent homes. Thus we all pay the price of allowing violence to flourish within families.

- 5) **MYTH** Battered women provoke, deserve or like being beaten.

**FACT** No one likes to be abused, and no one deserves it. While a woman may do or say something which makes her husband angry, she does not provoke him into hitting her. He chooses to be violent.

It is critical that anger be distinguished from violence. Everyone in a close relationship at some point becomes angry with his or her partner. However, most women and men do not respond to that anger by striking the other person. There is no moral or legal justification for hitting another person except self-defense.

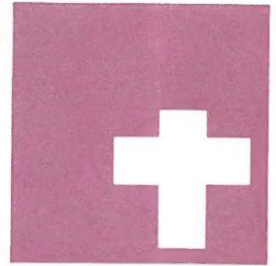
Most men who batter do so in every intimate relationship, underscoring the fact that it is their behavior, and not the woman's, which is the problem. It is important to realize that nothing the woman does or does not do causes the violence toward her. Only the violent person can eliminate the abuse from the relationship.

It is of urgent importance that clergy and laity become aware of these facts and take action to alleviate them. The battered women who sit in church and temple pews need to know that help and support are available to them in their religious communities. They need informed and sensitive persons to whom to go for advice and help. In addition, abusive men, who otherwise may be respected members of the congregation, must hear from their religious leaders that violence toward their spouses is a grievous wrong and will not be tolerated. The children in these families need help to deal with their fears and confusion.

Religious leaders can no longer ignore domestic violence and assume that it does not occur within the families in their congregations. They must respond with a more prophetic, more realistic and more pastoral attitude toward these troubled individuals and families.

As difficult as it may be to face, clergy must also learn to place the health and safety of individual family members above maintenance of the family unit at all costs. As will be explained elsewhere in this manual, the family cannot be preserved at the expense of its individual members.

The purpose of this manual is to provide clergy with the information they need to respond to the needs of the violent families in their congregations, and to become informed community spokespersons on the issue of violence within the home. Violence within the family must be recognized as equally wrong and dangerous as violence on the street and violence among nations if progress towards true peace and wholeness is ever to be made.



## Religious Faith

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Help or Hindrance?



# Religious Faith: Help or Hindrance

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite

## HINDRANCES

Telephone calls to shelters for abused women often begin with the phrase, "I'm a religious woman, but \_\_\_\_\_" or "I'm a Bible believer, but \_\_\_\_\_." The women who make these calls assume that it is contrary to their religious beliefs to seek help when their husbands act violently toward them. They have made the judgment, often unconsciously, that their religions in some ways permit their husbands to chastise them; or at the least, that if they receive abuse, it is their religious duty to accept and forgive this behavior. Thus, their religious beliefs can become a hindrance to their seeking help and to effecting change to reduce the violence in their homes.

Religious texts and traditions have often been interpreted to reinforce the view that women should submit to abuse from their husbands or partners. For example, the Genesis text concerning the expulsion from the garden reads in part, "To the woman God said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'" (Genesis 3:16.) One abused woman, upon reading this verse, commented, "God punished women more."

Often times clergy have not only not corrected these misinterpretations, they have furthered the view that women must put up with abuse against them. In her book *Battered Wives*, Del Martin was one of the first to expose the extent of abuse against wives. Her book begins with a letter from an abused woman who writes, in part:

Now, the first response to this story, which I myself think of, will be "Why didn't you seek help?" I did. Early in our marriage I went to a clergyman who, after a few visits, told me that my husband meant no real harm, that he was just confused and felt insecure. I was encouraged to be more tolerant and understanding. Most important, I was told to forgive him the beatings just as Christ has forgiven me from the cross.<sup>1</sup>

And, lest it be thought that this is a modern viewpoint, compare this reply from John Calvin to a woman parishioner who wrote to him to appeal for help because her husband beat her.

We have a special sympathy for poor women who are evilly and roughly treated by their husbands, because of the roughness and cruelty of the tyranny and captivity which is their lot. We do not find ourselves permitted by the Word of God, however, to advise a woman to leave her husband, except by force of necessity, and we do not understand this force to be operative when a husband behaves roughly and uses threats to his wife, nor even when he beats her, but only when there is imminent peril to her life, whether from persecution by the husband or by his conspiring . . . We exhort her to bear with patience the cross which God has seen fit to place upon her; and meanwhile not to deviate from the duty which she has before God to please her husband, but to be faithful whatever happens.<sup>2</sup>

It is women with strong religious beliefs who often have the most trouble accepting that the violence used against them by their husbands is wrong. They believe that resistance to this violence is unscriptural and that submission is the will of God. Religious women are supposed to be meek, they believe, and to claim any rights for oneself is committing the sin of pride.

Sometimes, however, these women do try to seek help. They may find not only unsympathetic clergy, but also social workers or mental health workers who consider the women's religious beliefs to be the chief roadblock to changing their situations. Some lay counselors can become intolerant when a battered woman describes her home in religious terms. They may offer her a bewildering range of advice, which may ultimately seem to be a choice between her religious beliefs and living in a violent home. The result can be either a loss of her beliefs or a return to a violent situation.

It is especially important, therefore, for those who work with abused women, to recognize that religious beliefs can become a source of strength for these women in changing their situations.

## HELPS

The scriptural witness and religious traditions contain many affirmations of women and prohibitions of violence. These resources can be drawn upon in helping women retain their faith while rejecting the violence perpetrated against them.

A core insight in this regard is that the Scriptures are written from the perspective of the powerless. God's chosen are a band of runaway slaves. God identifies this group, however, as the people of God and in so doing reveals that God is a God who sides with the powerless. Those who are powerless and suffering in Scripture are always especially valuable in God's eyes.

God's care for widows and orphans in the Hebrew Bible is an especially important theme and can be helpful in demonstrating that those women who are oppressed by the customs of their culture are particularly dear to God. Historically, a widow in Israel was effectively without economic support and a nonperson in the eyes of society. The children of a widow, because they too lacked economic support, were considered orphans even if their mother was alive. However, Exodus 22:2-24 demonstrates that God judges especially severely those who oppress widows and orphans.

The powerless not only have God on their side, but God is always working to change their situation, as the whole of the book of Exodus attests. It is essential in the New Testament to see Jesus of Nazareth as continuing this identification of God with the oppressed, as one who announced his ministry as "release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-20).

Jesus explicitly extends to women the liberty he proclaims for the oppressed. Examples of Jesus' care for women are seen in the story of the widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4), the forgiveness of the prostitute who has faith (Mark 14:3-9), the healing of the woman with the bloody flux (Luke 8:43-48), and the defense of Mary's right to discipleship (John 4:16-30). Especially important is the inclusion of Jesus' defense of the woman who would have been stoned (abused) for committing adultery (John 7:53-8:11). This defense takes on new significance when one realizes that, for a Jewish woman, committing adultery could consist merely of speaking alone to a man not her husband. Jesus breaks laws and customs which are contrary to his vision of the establishment in breaking of God's reign.

Jewish cultural traditions also contain many affirmations of women. The following example of the interpretation of Jewish law as forbidding the abuse of women is informative in this regard. G.G. Coulton, in his work *Medieval Panorama*, quotes Rabbi Perez who shortly before the year 1300 made this case:

The cry of the daughters of our people has been heard concerning the sons of Israel who raise their hands to strike their wives. Yet who has given a husband the authority to beat his wife? Is he not rather forbidden to strike any person in Israel? . . . Nevertheless have we heard of cases where Jewish women complained regarding their treatment before the communities and no action was taken on their behalf. We have therefore decreed that any Jew may be compelled, on application of his wife or one of her near relatives to undertake by a *herem* (written document) not to beat his wife in anger or cruelty or so as to disgrace her, for that is against Jewish practice. If anyone will stubbornly refuse to obey our words, the court of the place, to which the wife or her relatives will bring complaint, shall assign her maintenance according to her station and according to the custom of the place where she dwells. They shall fix her alimony as though her husband were away on a distant journey.<sup>3</sup>

Examples of religious affirmation of women, especially when these include a rejection of violence against women, are a good beginning for the recognition that religious beliefs can be a source of change in a violent home.

## THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

It is essential to recognize that while some interpretations of religious beliefs can be a hindrance to stopping violence against women, other religious beliefs can be drawn upon as a source of change. These resources can be used to address several themes of great significance, both theologically and pastorally.

### Suffering

Why is there suffering? This is a question of profound theological complexity. It speaks to us of the very nature of God, yet it is often the shoals upon which religious faith will ultimately founder.

Very frequently an abused woman will have made some very concrete judgments about why she is abused by her husband and why God permits her to suffer in this way. A forty year old woman told her pastor, "I know why he (her



husband) hits me. It's God's way of punishing me for running away from home when I was 17 and living with my boyfriend for a year."

It is hard for a human being to accept random, meaningless acts of violence. They seem to threaten God's control over the events of human life. Therefore people explain violence to themselves in such a way that it can seem part of "God's will" or "God's plan."

Unfortunately, these explanations project a God who uses violence as punishment, a God who is vengeful and angry. In struggling to submit to the will of such a God, people can become very angry at God and can lose their faith.

But Scriptures and tradition point to a God who forgives all of humanity, not easily and painlessly, but through the incredible identification of God with human suffering. In Exodus God declares "I have heard the cries of my people Israel." (See Exodus 2:23-25.) God works in history to lead the Israelite people out of suffering into the promised land. He gives them *shalom*, a Hebrew word which means peace but which includes the concepts of wholeness, justice, righteousness and fullness of life. In the Christian tradition, the incarnation of God in Christ is this same identification with the human condition. In the cross, God in Christ cannot remain remote from the anguish of human suffering. Through the resurrection, God has pronounced a judgment that suffering and death are not the meanings of human life.

God does not will the abuse of women by their husbands. In the witness of God's mighty acts in history, God is seen to judge severely those who abuse the image of God, the human person. It is important to locate accurately the responsibility of the abuser for the abuse of a woman, and to clearly interpret this action as being against the will of God for human life.

When women suffer abuse, they often feel abandoned by God. Their abandonment is complete: family, friends, doctors, police, social workers, lawyers all seem to be indifferent to battered women's plight. It is a small step then for a woman to believe that God is also indifferent to her and her situation. But a central religious message of the Judeo-Christian tradition is that God is never indifferent to human suffering. The Psalms of the Hebrew Bible, in particular, witness to the psalmist's conviction that though we "walk through the valley of the shadow of death," God is with us and will protect us from those who seek to harm us (Psalm 23). The Apostle Paul writes:

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

While it is true that some women who have suffered abuse have later found that this experience of trial brought them closer to God, it is not the case that suffering itself is redemptive. The Western religious traditions affirm that God's will for humanity is not suffering, but wholeness; not death, but life. Jesus says, "I came that (you) may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10.)

## **Marriage**

Another important theological theme to address when discussing wife abuse is that of the religious interpretations of the marriage relationship. The idea that marriage relations are fixed by God, and that God's blessing entails a certain pattern of dominance and submission, is used as a source of religious legitimization of the abuse of wives. However, it can be shown from within the Western religious traditions that this is a distorted perspective.

In Judaism, marriage is looked upon as part of the plan of God for the good ordering of the whole of life (earlier defined as *shalom*). Marriage is a covenantal relationship in which both partners have certain rights and responsibilities. It is a relationship of mutual respect; in fact, it is a microcosm of the respectful relations which bind the macrocosm of Jewish society. In this sense, peace in the family prefigures the peaceful ordering of all creation. Jewish leaders consider this an essential characteristic of Jewish family life:

Peace will remain a distant vision until we do the work of peace ourselves. If peace is to be brought into the world we must bring it first to our families and communities.<sup>4</sup>

This peace does not entail a static notion of enforcement. Judaism has long maintained a respect for the rights of married women, as the quotation cited earlier from the thirteenth century reveals. Respect must be freely given and cannot be forced. Thus, women are not required to submit to abuse nor to tolerate a marriage that is repugnant to them.

In common with Christianity, Jews hold that adultery violates the marriage covenant and is grounds for divorce. Likewise, abuse, which is a violation of the central tenet of mutual respect, violates the covenant and can also be a valid reason for divorce:

... (I)f a man was found to be a wife-beater, he had to pay damages and provide her (his wife) with separate maintenance. Failing that, the wife had valid grounds for compelling a divorce.<sup>5</sup>

In the Christian tradition, discussion of marriage frequently involves the citation of Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord," to the exclusion of other biblical material. Further, the Ephesians text is not read in its entirety. The whole passage enjoins mutual respect and accountability and stresses that "husbands should love their wives as their own bodies." These further verses argue that "He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of His body." (Ephesians 5:28-30.) Clearly this text does not support the physical or psychological abuse of wives, but rather interprets marriage as part of God's plan for human well-being, much as does the rabbinical material cited above.

Ephesians is not the only biblical text on male-female relations to be found in the Bible. It is but one of several and represents what has been called a biblical trajectory; that is, a line of vision within the biblical corpus. Other trajectories coexist within the Bible, which, when taken together, give a more complete picture of the Christian approach to marriage. Another trajectory is found in Galatians 3:28, which holds that in Christ the societal distinctions between men and women are dissolved and unity in the body of Christ is the norm. This passage can be used to support a reading of the Ephesians text as calling for mutual respect and to enjoin upon marriage partners a model of equality rather than of hierarchy.

This Scriptural interpretation is particularly important, since current research on the abuse of women in marriage has shown that stereotypic notions of male dominance provide the chief legitimation for abuse. It is especially important, therefore, to seek a theological interpretation wherein it is God's will that human interactions be characterized by mutuality, not by dominance and submission. Such an interpretation is supported in the Gospel of Matthew: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant." (Matthew 20:25-26.)

In some Christian communities there are strong traditions against divorce. The biblical texts in which Jesus speaks against divorce are used as a theological rationale for these doctrinal positions. But again, these texts must be looked at in context. For example, in Matthew 5:31-32, Jesus says, "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.'" The context surrounding this injunction is an abuse of Jewish law in which husbands were divorcing their wives on the slightest pretext and turning them out of the house. Since an unmarried Jewish woman had no effective means of support other than prostitution, this was a tremendous abuse of women. Jesus' insistence that a husband have valid grounds for divorce is, in context, a defense of women and a plea for their societal rights. This position is consistent with Jesus' remarkable defense of women on many occasions and his particular sensitivity to their plight.

## Turning Around

In Western religious traditions, the judgment of sin is always accompanied by the hope of forgiveness and change. This hope must be held out to all those involved in the cycle of family violence. But (and this should be emphasized with particular strength), forgiveness and reconciliation are not possible when no change is occurring. In the Christian tradition, forgiveness is preceded by *metanoia*, a turning around of the sinner away from sin and toward God. Reconciliation follows a turning around. Sometimes, for the violent family, turning around may include separation and divorce. Sometimes it is possible in the relationship for the abusive husband to seek treatment and for the marriage to be rebuilt. But whatever the circumstances, forgiveness and reconciliation are not possible without change. Such reconciliation is merely a continuation of the abuse and is an affront to the grace of God.

It is important to remember that religious leaders are among those most frequently consulted when women face abuse from their husbands. The failure to provide the kind of religious support that can enable an abusive relationship to change is a failure for the whole religious community, because it has permitted human life to be broken, perhaps even lost. Religious beliefs can be a tremendous source of strength in changing patterns of wife abuse; religious beliefs can also be a strong legitimation for the perpetuation of wife abuse. It is up to the religious communities of this country to ensure that the supportive religious resources are paramount and to be a clear voice condemning the abuse of women everywhere.

## NOTES

1. Del Martin, *Battered Wives* (New York: Pocket Books, 1976), p.2.
2. *Calvin's Work*, Hughes translation, column 539.
3. G.G. Coulton, *Medieval Panorama* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1947), p. 617.
4. *Gates of Repentance*, Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1978, p. 67.
5. Maurice Lamm, *Jewish Way in Love and Marriage*, p. 157.



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## Clergy Response

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Initial Thoughts



# Initial Thoughts

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Carol Findon Bingham

After forty-five years in the ordained ministry a recent retiree was asked, "Throughout your years in ministry, approximately how many times have you been approached for help by an abused woman?" He answered, "To my knowledge, I have never encountered a battered woman."

This man in all likelihood was telling the truth as he perceived it. However, there can be no doubt that he was simply not aware of the immensity of the problem of domestic violence, or that in fact about half of the women he encountered throughout his ministry have been abused at least once in their lifetimes. Lack of awareness and denial have been the sin of many, including the clergy and other helping professionals. Domestic violence needs to be addressed as a major sin both of our society and of our interpersonal relationships.

We are beginning to become more aware of violence in our homes, especially as it pertains to the innocent abused child. But little is being done in our society to address the needs of women in abusive situations. Many say that women are adults and intelligent beings, able to do something about it. Unfortunately this is not always the case. Many women are trapped in abusive relationships with few options. Many are forced to consider themselves the lesser partner in the marriage covenant.

In many ways, the church has ignored the problem of violence in the home. In some ways the church has permitted this evil to develop, because of its silence in exposing the abusive sin behind locked doors. Women have been told through years of misinterpreted Scriptures to be submissive to the greater authorities, and to be subject to the ones who are directing and controlling their lives.

It is the time now to look at ways in which the clergy and the church can help change the rampant course of violence in our homes. Clergy need to be aware of this evil and to address the issue as an injustice toward women when preaching and teaching the Word. As representatives of God, clergy are called to be prophetic by identifying domestic violence as evil and by bringing the knowledge of the peace of God to all people. As servants of God, clergy are called to be pastoral, offering care and concern for both victims and their abusive partners.

## **Self Assessment**

Before any pastoral care or counseling can be given, one must examine one's own feelings about the issue of domestic violence, and specifically about the battered woman. It may be a very difficult exercise to look at violence on an interpersonal level, because it may trigger some personal defense mechanisms of denial and distortions of reality or perception. The retired clergyman mentioned earlier possibly denied the reality of domestic violence even within his own parish. Perhaps he believed that in the house of God, the family of God, domestic violence does not occur. His perceptions were distorted. No religious community is without victims and abusers. Perhaps he was embarrassed to deal with it, or did not know how to do so. Perhaps he did not want to get involved. Perhaps it was a painful issue for him personally. The initial prelude to helping the abused woman is to discover one's own feelings and thoughts about domestic violence both personally and professionally. A good place to start is with a study of Psalm 55.

## **Pastoral Care Is To Help**

Another important step before offering pastoral care and counseling is to remember that the clergy's role is to help, not hinder. The clergy's response can either assist the woman or condemn her to more violence. It is not unusual for the battered woman to hear the distorted response, "What have you done to provoke such violence?" Immediately she is placed into a defensive stance, feeling intimidated and guilty for the relationship which is not whole. She desires to hear the words of comfort and peace, rather than the words which place control and blame for the violence upon her. It is better to listen empathetically to her story, her pain, her feelings of inadequacy, guilt and embarrassment. A counselor must enter into her world, to the extent possible, to see life from her battered eyes and to try to understand the fear which distorts all of her life and being. What would Jesus Christ say to this woman? One must remember how Jesus compassionately spoke to women: the woman at the well, the woman with flow of blood, and Mary and Martha. Jesus did not say to go home and pray harder. He didn't say that the women were doing something to deserve their suffering or the violent actions of others. Jesus listened, had compassion, and spoke words of comfort and peace, acknowledging the love and peace of God in our lives.

Perhaps the greatest need for each clergyperson responding to domestic violence is not only to recognize her or his own personal feelings in facing the issues, but also to assess her or his own counseling abilities in assisting the abused woman. A clergyperson must ask if she/he is professionally prepared to deal adequately with crisis situations and/or long-term counseling. What one says and how one handles oneself at that initial contact with an abused woman may determine her physical, emotional and spiritual health for a long time to come. Many victims are turned off by their pastor's lack of understanding and compassion for their needs.

### **New Insights into Relationships and Care-Giving**

Carol Gilligan, in her book *In a Different Voice*, has presented a new psychological theory examining woman's development.<sup>1</sup> The dictum that men and women are psychologically different is documented from the woman's perspective. Through infancy to adolescence to adulthood, a woman deals with the issues of separation and attachment. As she searches for her identity she asks, "Who am I?"

For the male of the species, Gilligan says that separation or autonomy is the fulcrum of identity. There is an ethic of rights built on equality, fairness, equal respect and justice. Males are direct, aggressive and logical. They possess a sense of "I" which is to be directive. In order to grow into adulthood, the male needs to renounce the relationship with the mother so that he can protect his sense of autonomy. Theologically the focus is justice. He emphasizes ideas and achievements. His identity is separateness, what he does in the world.

Gilligan identifies attachment or relationship as the fulcrum of female identity. There is an ethic of responsibility and care, equity, a recognition of differences, compassion and mercy. Theologically the focus is mercy. The female values her relationships with responsibility, care and nurture. Morality for her stems from these attachments. Her identity is defined within the context of a relationship. Her identity is intimacy, who she is in the world.

According to Gilligan, the male's societal orientation is positional. He has a problem with relationships. He learns the rules of society and competes with others. His success is measured in separation. In contrast, the woman's societal orientation is personal. She has a problem with individuation; her success is measured by connectedness. Success for the male, therefore, is in his achievements; for the female it is in her responsibility and care-giving.

The theories of Carol Gilligan have immense implications for men and women enmeshed in the problems of domestic violence. The study of power and conflict in relationships is an area which needs to be addressed. Her book has opened a path for new research in the study of the psychology of intimate human relationships; perhaps in the future, social scientists will have a clearer understanding of the aberrant behavior of the abuser and the varied responses of the victims.

### **Male and Female Clergy as Caregivers**

In some cases the abused woman will not go for help. She endures the suffering in silence. In other cases, the woman may cautiously approach a minister for help. She may be direct or indirect in her plea. She may speak rationally and in clearly expressed words as she explains exactly what has happened. Or she may speak around the subject and never specifically mention the abuse. She may minimize the violent actions. Can male clergy understand how she feels, or will the clergyman also minimize the violence? The answer is a qualified yes and no. Many male clergy, although not all, have the gift of understanding and compassionate loving care and can in fact be a great help to battered women.

Charles R. B. Beckmann, M.D., Assistant Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Co-Director of the Sexual Assault Program at the University of Illinois Medical Center in Chicago, spoke in the fall of 1985 at a training session for hospital staff in Morris, Illinois. He has found that with the proper techniques and guidelines in aiding victims of sexual assault, male professional caregivers are just as effective as female caregivers. He believes that if a male helper can get in tune with the fear, feelings and helplessness of the female victim, the male helper is able to be an understanding and good caregiver to her.

Can it not be the same for male clergy responding to the calls for help by the abused woman? Can not the clergyman be caring and concerned for the victim as he listens to her story? The clergyman, in order to be a helpmate, needs to place himself in the role of being victimized and feel the pain of being the helpless object of attack by someone stronger and domineering. Few clergymen permit themselves to be vulnerable and accepting of the feelings of the victim. Here lies their biggest defense mechanism. When all clergy can accept, as did Jesus Christ, the physical suffering of the oppressed, then and only then can we begin to expel the sin of domestic violence.

Many clergywomen can no doubt identify more easily with the problems faced by the abused woman. A caring nonjudgmental person of the same sex who listens empathetically to her stories does more to help than can be explored here. This is not to say that male clergy cannot assist, but the fact is that many abused women are more



comfortable with women clergy. Speaking about the incidents of abuse and retelling her stories help the woman release the bonds of unhealthy emotions caused by these incidents. Woman-to-woman dialogue seems to assist in the healing process. However, a woman pastor needs to be aware of, and deal with, her own growing anger and rage in the counseling process. Hearing the victim's stories can recall the counselor's personal issues or the struggles of women over the centuries. Do these feelings come from her own experiences and personal issues or from the collective anger generated by the awareness of the status and role of women in our society? A careful analysis and understanding of her own feelings will enable the clergywoman to be a much more effective helper.

### **The Real Power**

Because of women's historical position in society, our culture has permitted the sin of silently submitting to abuse. The woman has been socially classified as the inferior submissive partner who needs to be ruled and dominated. The more powerful person has been a member of the socially dominant sex — the male. Therefore, domestic violence is an issue of power and control. The abuser has an insatiable need to be powerful and always in control of the victim. This desire is enhanced by the cultural mores which sanction dominance and submission according to sex.

The clergy's response however, carries with it the ultimate power which is the grace of God. Clergypersons by their very role are powerful persons and carry much weight in the community. We need to move out in faith and dare to risk speaking out against the violence which breaks the covenant of male-female relationships. We must respond pastorally, prophetically and preventively to the issues of domestic violence as author Reverend Marie Fortune has called us to do.<sup>2</sup>

Abuse violates God's good gift of creation and the order of all things, of male and female created in the image of God to work together for the continuing re-creation of the world. We are called to be servants, working toward that end in which violence is no longer a part of interpersonal relationships.

### **NOTES**

1. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
2. Marie M. Fortune and Denise L. Hormann, *Family Violence: A Workshop Manual for Clergy and Other Service Providers* (Seattle: The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 4250 South Mead Street, Seattle, WA 98118, 1980), p. 55.





## Clergy Response

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Counseling and Support



# Counseling and Support

Annette M. Hulefeld

*Editor's note: The following article is presented as the author's perspective, which is not the only perspective of how to counsel the battered woman. For other approaches see the bibliography, Appendix E.*

## Assumptions

"Is there really anything I can do to help domestic violence victims?" To answer this question, the following assumptions need to be stated: a) that the role of the clergy is one which provides both supportive counseling and networking with referral sources; b) that clergy must not offer therapy unless they are clinically trained and certified; and c) that there are varying degrees of psychological damage resulting from repeated batterings which need to be fully assessed in cultural, social, institutional, developmental, intrapsychic, interpersonal, and family systems terms. Clergy are challenged to become an integral unit of a macro-system of support with the secular therapeutic professions. A cooperative effort is needed to break through the destructive patterns of violence.

## Dynamics of Violence

Within the last few years, much attention has been focused on the external (social, cultural, legal) factors which contribute to the phenomenon of domestic violence. There has been a tendency to minimize or deny the impact of developmental issues of dependency, abandonment and loss, individuation, and intimacy within violent relationships for fear of blaming the victim and of not making the abuser responsible for his actions. Blaming others and focusing exclusively on external systems, however, can diminish the victim's sense of personal power and thereby heighten the possibility for further abuse. To ignore the internal perspective by not searching for answers within oneself is like trying to remove the plank from the neighbor's eye while ignoring the splinter in one's own.

From a family systems perspective, violence serves to maintain a balance of unequal power and control and to regulate the degree of intimacy and closeness between couples. Culturally, it is acceptable for the man to attack and for the woman to submit and withdraw. On an intrapsychic and interpersonal level, violence is not only an attempt to annihilate the partner, but also paradoxically serves to protect the abuser's psyche from feelings of impending abandonment and loss. Violence protects the disintegration of the abuser's own fragile, chaotic sense of self. If a man has a partner upon whom he can project his deepest unconscious and unacceptable parts and feelings, then battering becomes a brutal and distorted means of destroying his own feelings and thoughts without conscious recognition and responsibility. Whereas the man externalizes the inner void by attempting to destroy, so the woman internally protects herself from a raging sense of abandonment by minimizing the damage and danger and by withdrawing into shame, blame, and guilt. Her emptiness is akin to the nothingness, the darkness of the soul — a feeling of her bones being dried up, her hope being lost, her sense of being clearly cut off. (See Ezekiel, 37:1-11.)

The common thread and self-regulatory mechanism underlying the violent behaviors, however, are loss and abandonment. The manifestations of these losses are exhibited by the abuser in either denial of feelings, or in generalized feelings of blame, shame, powerlessness, minimalization, impulsive actions, rage, identity confusion, low self-esteem, difficulty in making decisions and difficulty in maintaining close relationships. In particular, these fears reflect early childhood deprivation of basic needs and become reactivated during times of transition and stress, such as in pregnancy, the birth of a child, or a change in employment status, to name a few. Such changes stimulate real and perceived losses, and if the external and internal structures and resources of an individual are inadequate, then violence can occur. Thus, an abuser, who fears and perceives that his wife is ignoring him for the children, can cope with his feelings by massive denial but will find some excuse to "beat her into submission" and/or react with compulsive jealousy, demanding her total attention. The wife, in turn, who deems herself as "not being good enough," can feel impelled to attend to his every demand for fear of being destroyed, rejected, and left alone. This is not to imply that her fears of being killed are not real. What is important is to not underestimate the power of the psychological factors underlying both the abuser's and the victim's behaviors. What appears on the surface as control or submission may well be an attempt to control one's own unconscious, desperate sense of nothingness, loss, rage and disillusionment.

## Responses

"So — what am I to do?" First, a minister needs to recognize his or her own limitations and then be willing to network with, and refer to, specialized professionals to deal with both the concrete issues (shelter, financial, legal) and the psychological elements of abuse. Once the safety of the individual is assured, which must be the primary concern, the challenge becomes one of responding with presence rather than reacting, and with listening rather than advising. A good shepherd (male or female) knows the needs of the flock, and the flock in turn knows and responds to the shepherd's voice. The implication here is that unless clergy are willing to proclaim the good news that violence is intolerable, and unless they become knowledgeable as to the factors contributing to violence, then abused women will not seek sanctuary in the churches.

Of equal importance is the commitment of clergy to encounter and embrace their own potentially violent "demons": negative attitudes, prejudices, uncomfortable feelings, and senses of anger and powerlessness. Just as unconscious motivations are destructive to the victim and the abuser, so can these feelings in the clergy hinder the helping process. For example, what if a woman sitting in the office is enraged and demands that the minister "do something," while at the same time her children are whining or out of control? What if the minister is suddenly overcome by a feeling of "she deserves to be beaten — what a nag!" What if the woman pathetically states that she feels this is God's will and that she's waiting to die? What if the minister has unresolved rage toward men and the patriarchal system which then gets in the way of listening to the woman's desire to "work things out" with a partner? In all these instances, responding to the woman's internal chaos, terror, and fears challenges the listener's capacity to assist with the woman's external needs, while setting internal limits on his or her own feelings and attitudes so as not to project them or to act out in the woman's presence.

The most effective counselor, whether lay or religious, is the one who is nonjudgmental, who has faced her or his inner feelings, and who can allow the woman the choice of self-determination. One needs to remember that beatings and verbal assaults severely disrupt a person's ability to trust. Therefore, one needs to pay special attention not only to words but also to nuances of body language, intonation of voice, facial expressions, and eye contact so as to minimize the possibility that the woman will perceive rejection and blame.

Another caution for those counseling a battered woman is to resist the temptation to urge her to immediately and permanently sever the abusive relationship and/or to talk derogatorily of her mate. If initiated too quickly, such approaches can catapult the woman into hopelessness and despair. Her identity is that of a victim, and to challenge that without first allowing her time to reclaim a different sense of self by exploring options and processing underlying feelings is similar to cutting a boat loose from its anchor — it goes adrift without direction. Women do not like abuse, yet, to disengage from the fears of being a separate entity is a painful, difficult and time consuming process. Formation of a good, positive sense of identity and self-image requires that the woman be in contact with self-developed others — those who can maintain a firm sense of their own identity so as to be capable of mirroring and witnessing to the woman's acceptance and affirmation of herself.

Abused people in general have not been exposed to this self-affirming experience and thus come into relationships with distorted, wounded self-images. A weak sense of identity leads one to continually search for the "one person" who will meet the deep need for recognition and approval. Sadly enough, many women have been raised to believe that in order to have a purpose in life, a woman needs to be dependent on a man. When the man is abusive, there is a self-fulfilling prophecy of one's own worst fears: "I'm no good — I can never please you." The unspoken message here is "I can't please you anymore than I could my mother or father — I wasn't good enough for them either." What appears then to be a resignation to the abuse can be an unconscious repetition of early family patterns in which there is a desperate attempt to make possible what cannot be — a hope that "if I'm good enough, I'll be loved." The relationship becomes a life and death struggle for survival; after each instance of abuse, the woman holds on to an illusive notion that "this time it will be different, it won't happen again and I can make it O.K." This magical thinking serves to protect her and to ward off the inevitable losses which the abused woman has come to expect. Submission to violence allows her to cope with that which is externally uncontrollable, but it cripples the emergence of her own inner control and determination.

Obviously, separating from an abusive attachment is difficult on many levels. What the church can offer is a sanctuary, a safe place wherein trust can develop and whereby a reality other than abuse can be called forth. When the abusive message is "you are worth nothing except in terms of living for my needs," the church can present a radically different message of "I came that (you) may have life, and have it abundantly," (John 10:10). To fully understand this message takes time and patience. In becoming a refuge, clergy will need to take time to consider how they will assume the "good parent" role and how they may have the "bad parent" figure projected onto them. In terms of developmental process, if the pastor succumbs to the role of the "all powerful, ever-rescuing, ever-kind

mother or father figure," then early symbiotic and dependency needs may be stimulated in the person she or he is counseling. The result may be the individual crying out "take care of me, read my mind, tell me what to do, I am helpless." Likewise, intolerable feelings of rage and abandonment may be projected onto the pastor, with accusations of "you don't care, you don't listen, and you're just like the rest of them." Understandably, it would be easy to respond to these accusations with anger; yet, unless the underlying issues are recognized, the pastor may unconsciously encourage the repetition of a vicious cycle of powerlessness rather than empowering autonomy and self-directedness.

### **Conjoint Counseling**

Conjoint meetings (couple counseling) are not appropriate during times of crisis. However, if the couple demands to be seen and if negotiating reduces the potential for immediate abuse, then strict boundaries regarding time, content of material, and behaviors need to be set by the pastor. Meetings that are more than an hour long are potentially dangerous as feelings and impulses are too easily stimulated. If the couple lives together, a contract with the abuser forbidding physical abuse is mandatory. If the couple is separated, then sufficient time needs to elapse for the woman to leave the counseling sessions prior to the man's dismissal. Many a woman has been "held hostage" by an angry husband following a meeting in which he felt he wasn't heard or understood. Care must be taken not to push for quick resolution; early attempts at reconciliation can elicit fear in the woman of "I'll be forced to return — I won't be believed — I'm trapped" and can elicit a fantasy for the man of "she'll return, all I have to do is convince her." Conjoint meetings work best with couples who have some capacity for recognizing and responding to each other's needs and for those who have some ability to tolerate opposing feelings. Without the capacity to listen and feel for the other, meetings can turn into intimidating battlefields, with each one attempting to prove who is right and who is wrong.

To reiterate, a decision regarding appropriate treatment for the abuser and the victim ought to be made by professionals trained and certified in the area of abuse. Because clergy so often see abuse victims first, they are indeed a vital link in a network of supportive services for women and men involved in violent relationships.

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INDICATORS**

The following is a list of possible indicators that a woman may be involved in a physically abusive relationship.

- isolation from social environment (friends, family, church)
- history of physical abuse in family of origin
- family life cycle of crisis and chaos
- overinvolvement and exclusiveness with one's own children
- physical violence toward the children
- self-depreciation and exhibition of poor self-esteem
- global blaming of self for situations that fall short of intended expectations
- anxiety ridden, fearful, vigilant of partner's moods and actions
- overly protective, compulsively jealous partner
- chronic depression
- thoughts of or attempts to commit suicide
- increased medical attention for chronic, "unexplainable" somatic illnesses ("freak accidents," migraine headaches, back, neck pains, overall bodily aches)
- continued use of prescribed tranquilizers, sedatives, anti-depressants, sleeping pills, narcotics/analgesics
- withdrawn, "pulled in" body language, poor eye contact, sad/dull affect, sensitive to touch

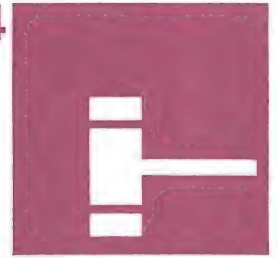
# Practical Helps for Clergy Counseling Abused Women

Carol Findon Bingham

- **Listen empathetically with active listening skills.** Speak to reflect back to her the information which she has given you. Your primary role is to be her confessor; therefore, listen. Silently pray that God's grace is present as the healing process toward wholeness begins.
- **Affirm her courageous act, that of coming to you.** You may in fact be the first person whom she has approached. Healing begins when the victim speaks of the violence and names it as such.
- **Counsel the battered woman without physically touching her.** Give comfort without putting your arm around her shoulder or holding her hand. If she has been sexually or physically abused, any touch may recall painful memories.
- **Acknowledge your limits.** It is wise to know how well you are prepared to deal with domestic violence. Unless you are clinically trained on the issues of domestic violence, refer her to someone who can be a healing resource leading her toward recovery.
- **Be aware of your own emotional shields of protection.** As you hear her painful story, your feelings and emotions will come to the surface. Therefore, try not to block the reception of her story in an attempt to protect your own feelings and to prevent your emotions from surfacing.
- **Believe everything she says; do not doubt her; and do not question her accuracy.** She needs a trusting pastor and a compassionate shepherd. Remember that she is probably minimizing the violence. What you hear may only be the tip of the iceberg. In time she may share more with you.
- **Tell her that it is not her fault.** No one deserves to be abused. It is not God's intention that she should suffer and be violated. All blame rests with the abuser. She did not in any way cause this abuse.
- **Tell her that she is not alone.** It is important and empowering for a battered woman to realize that millions of women suffer abuse at the hands of their partners.
- **Affirm her faith no matter where she stands theologically.** At this time of crisis her present faith stance may be the only thing she has to hold on to. It may not be "theologically correct" in your mind, but at the moment of crisis, this is all she has. Respond with positive statements about God ("God loves you and is with you in your suffering"). Respond with "I" statements ("I believe, however, that God does not want you to suffer or to be a victim of violence").
- **Offer her options in her search for wholeness.** Give her choices within her faith stance as she searches for a faithful understanding of what is happening to her. Also, remember that there is no right way and, concerning one's theological stance, no one person has all the right answers.
- **Quote Scripture passages which are liberating and which offer hope in times of suffering.** Quoting Scripture which is oppressive and which calls her to be submissive only encourages her to endure more violence at home.
- **Encourage her to contact the domestic violence program in your area.** There she will connect with counselors and support groups, receive legal advice and begin to bond with other victims and other women offering support and nurturance.



- **Encourage her to find a safe place.** Separation from the abuser prevents further violence. The church historically has offered sanctuary. Today the church can offer a safe home or a referral to a shelter for the victims of domestic violence.
- **Help her find economic assistance.** Because of the economic instability of society, it is difficult for a woman in crisis to find sufficient income to meet the needs of herself and her children. This is one of the reasons a woman may choose to stay in the violent home. Try to find a victim advocate in the parish who can help her secure public aid and/or other forms of economic assistance, if she is not in contact with a domestic violence program.
- **Be with her in her suffering and in her healing.** Do not stand withdrawn from her. Acknowledge your fears and pain as you hear her stories. But also praise her as she moves toward wholeness.
- **Confidentiality is of utmost importance.** She has come to you because she needs your help and trusts that you will be willing to help. That which she shares with you must be kept confidential. Unless you have her specific consent, you are ethically bound to tell no one.
- **The decision to pursue therapy is hers to make.** Not all battered women will wish to or need to seek therapy. Remember that it is your role to empower her, not to control her choices.
- **Assure her that all her statements to you are strictly confidential,** and that you will not speak to anyone else about her situation except to a helping agency when she has given you express permission to do so.



## Clergy Response

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Victim Rights and the Law



# Victim Rights and The Law

Kathleen Quinn

## The Legal Backdrop

Married women were for centuries legally considered the property of their husbands. Men had the right to beat their wives into submission and obedience. For example, according to English common law, a man was permitted to beat his wife with "a rod no thicker than his thumb." From this ancient law we have derived the everyday phrase "rule of thumb."

The United States' legal system is, of course, based upon the English one. It was not until the 1870's that state courts began to rule that a man was not legally entitled to batter his wife. Although wife abuse since then has been technically defined as criminal, strong cultural norms about male dominance, the sanctity of the family and the importance of private property have prevented these laws from being enforced.

It was not until the 1970's, when the widespread and very serious nature of domestic violence was realized, that efforts were undertaken to improve the legal system's response to battered women. As the battered women's movement grew, and more and more abused women shared their experiences, it became apparent that vast improvements were needed in both the availability and the enforcement of legal remedies.

From the late 1970's until now, almost every state has passed some form of domestic violence legislation. Most of the new laws provide for orders of protection, which are described later in this chapter. Many also expand police powers to arrest, and require law enforcement officers to assist domestic violence victims.

These new laws are part of a national effort to redefine "domestic disputes" as serious violent crimes. In fact, woman abuse is the most frequently experienced violent crime, resulting in more injuries to women than automobile accidents, rapes and muggings combined. According to the FBI, 40 percent of all female homicide victims (about 11 women a day), are murdered by their male partners, usually after having been beaten by those men for years. This is behavior which the community, through its criminal laws and their enforcement, must define as intolerable.

## THE RIGHT TO BE SAFE AT HOME AS WELL AS ON THE STREET

A fundamental right of any person in an organized social group is the right to be reasonably safe from injury or death at the hands of other persons. Another right is that of bringing to justice persons who violate the law. This is the essence of the social contract: we give up some of our independence to the government in exchange for some measure of security and protection under the law. According to our legal tenets, the only justification a citizen has for striking another person is if she or he is acting in self-defense. All other harmful touches are defined as battery or as other crimes.

If there is any place where we especially have a right to be safe, it is in our homes. According to the dictionary, a home is "an environment or haven of shelter, of happiness and love."<sup>1</sup> Yet statistically a woman is more likely to be injured by another person in her own home than on the street! Every family member has the legal and moral right to be safe from abuse by other family members. The family cannot be preserved at the expense of the lives and safety of its individual members. The nature of the relationship of the parties does not, and cannot be permitted to override the fundamental right to be safe. The primary concern of the clergy when working with violent families must be the safety of the victims. This safety may require the temporary or permanent separation of the parties and/or the arrest and prosecution of the offender. No true reconciliation can occur, nor is one desirable, until the violence has stopped and the domestic violence victim can live free from fear and harm.

It should be noted that sexual abuse, including rape, frequently accompanies battering. Many women report being subjected to brutal and degrading sexual acts, including the forced acting out of pornographic movies or magazine features. Rape and other types of sexual abuse within marriage must also be recognized as crimes. Rape is an act of violence, not sex. Within marriage, it is but another way the abuser attempts to dominate and control his partner.

More and more states have recognized that marital rape should not be exempted from prosecution and have recently passed laws to that effect. The New York State Supreme Court recently struck down the spousal rape exemption on the basis that it denied married women equal protection under the law. However, the number of marital rape cases brought to court is very small, in part because so few battered women even realize that they have been raped (rape is still generally thought of as a stranger-to-stranger crime), and in part because it is a difficult charge both to make and to prove.

However, women should realize that they have the right not to be sexually assaulted by their husbands. Forced or

violent sexual relations are not part of a healthy concept of marriage. Clergy can help prevent sexual assault within marriage by speaking out against it and by believing and supporting women who report it.

## **ORDERS OF PROTECTION**

As noted above, almost every state has passed domestic violence legislation in the last few years. Most of these new laws create domestic violence orders of protection. The content and enforcement of these laws varies from state to state, so readers should contact their state domestic violence coalition or local domestic violence programs to determine their own state law's provisions. However, following is a general description of common aspects of orders of protection.

### **Definition**

An order of protection (also in some states called a temporary restraining order or temporary injunction) is a court order prohibiting abuse by one family or household member against another. Abuse usually means an act or a threat of violence, but it can also include harassment.

### **Remedies**

In most states, the court can issue an order to prohibit abuse as defined in the statute, and to evict the abuser from the shared residence. This latter remedy, although sometimes used reluctantly by judges, is an important one because it provides the victim with the physical separation she needs to be safe, it enables her and the children to remain in the home, and it clearly requires the abuser to pay a steep cost for his behavior.

In some states the range of available remedies may also include awarding the victim temporary child custody, prohibiting child snatching, requiring the abuser to undergo counseling, prohibiting the theft or destruction of property, and ordering the abuser to pay not only medical and legal costs but also other costs resulting from the abuse, such as lost wages.

### **Who Is Protected**

In some states the law's protection is limited to spouses or former spouses, while in others it includes any household or family members, or present or former cohabitants.

### **Obtaining an Order of Protection**

In most states, an order of protection is obtained in civil court, either in conjunction with divorce or separation proceedings or as an independent action. Many, but not all states make it easy for a victim to petition for an order of protection without having to retain and pay an attorney. A few states provide for orders of protection in criminal cases as well.

Most states provide for an ex parte order in an emergency. This order is issued without notice to the abuser, and is effective for a few days only. An ex parte order enables the victim to obtain immediate, emergency relief. A full protection order is issued only after notice and the opportunity for a hearing are accorded the abuser.

### **Penalties for Violating Orders of Protection**

Violation of a civil court order can lead to the violator being held in contempt of court, which can result in fine or imprisonment, but the victim must first have the abuser brought back into court for a hearing. In nineteen states, however, the violator can be charged with a misdemeanor. This provision is an especially important one, because it provides the battered woman with the opportunity for immediate police enforcement of the order.

### **Benefits**

Orders of protection represent a significant improvement over the legal remedies previously available to battered women for several reasons:

- 1) They are clear indicators that domestic violence should be addressed by the legal system and that persons abused by household or family members require remedies specifically tailored to their needs.
- 2) In many states, the orders are comprehensive in the scope of remedies they provide. This means that victims are able to obtain all or most of the legal relief they need with just one legal action.
- 3) In a number of states, steps have been taken to make it easy for victims to obtain orders on their own behalf.
- 4) Violation of the order is a criminal offense in many states. This provision not only offers greater protection to the victims, but also conveys to the abusers the serious criminal nature of their behavior.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Arrest**

In recent years the majority of states have expanded police powers to arrest in domestic cases. In twenty-eight states, an officer *may* arrest if she or he has probable cause to believe that a domestic abuser has committed a misdemeanor. In six states the officer *must* arrest. Where the police have discretion, they usually require that the woman sign a complaint charging her abuser with an offense before they will arrest him.

There is increasing evidence that arrest and prosecution are powerful deterrents to repeated domestic assaults. In a major Police Foundation study in Minneapolis, abusers who were arrested were only about half as likely to repeat the violence in the following six months as were men handled in more traditional ways (for example, by being told to leave the house for a few hours). Other jurisdictions such as Duluth, Minnesota, have had great success in combining arrest with aggressive prosecution and mandatory group treatment for abusers. The recent Report of the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence recommends that arrest be the preferred response to domestic crimes.<sup>2</sup>

### **Assistance**

Many states require law enforcement officers to assist domestic violence victims by providing transportation to a shelter or hospital; by informing her of her legal rights; and by accompanying her back to her home, if she has fled, to collect personal items such as clothing for herself and her children. The majority of states also require that police keep improved records of domestic violence cases.

### **Importance of Effective Criminal Justice Response**

Improved response by the criminal justice system is extremely important in the effort to prevent and eliminate violence within families for two reasons:

- 1) It attaches a cost to the abuser's behavior. No longer protected by the legal system's traditional reluctance to intervene in domestic cases, the abuser must face arrest, prosecution, public embarrassment, and possible probation, fines or even imprisonment.
- 2) The criminal justice system is our secular mechanism for determining which behaviors will and will not be tolerated. A serious response by all parts of the criminal justice system conveys the community's message that battering family members is unacceptable behavior for which the violators will be held accountable. This message is extremely powerful: witness the recent remarkable reversal of our society's attitude toward drunk driving and the enforcement of laws designed to prevent it.

This same reversal can take place with regard to violent crimes within families. While it is certainly unfortunate that it is sometimes necessary to have legal measures taken by one family member against another, these measures are preferable to having a family member repeatedly brutalized or even killed by another. As Assistant U.S. Attorney General Lois H. Herrington recently said, "It is better for families to dissolve than to explode."<sup>3</sup>

## **CLERGY RESPONSIBILITIES**

The most important and helpful thing a member of the clergy can do with regard to the law is to convey the messages already discussed: that the abuse is not acceptable and is not the fault of the woman; that the first concern is the safety of the victim and her children; that the woman has a number of legal alternatives; and that help and support are available to her.

The minister does not need to know all the details of the law, nor should she or he attempt to give anyone specific legal advice about what to do in a particular case. But clergy can have information on hand about a domestic violence victim's rights under the law in their state (usually available from battered woman's shelters or state coalitions). They should also be able to refer battered women to domestic violence services in their own or nearby communities, where more specific legal information and assistance, as well as other shelter and support services, may be available.

Finally, the clergy are powerful voices in setting community standards. By speaking out against domestic violence, members of the clergy can be influential in communicating to the community and the justice system that it should take domestic crimes very seriously. More importantly, they can convey to both abusers and victims that violence within families is intolerable.

## NOTES

1. *Webster's New World Dictionary*, College Edition (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957).
2. Hartigan, Neil F., Illinois Attorney General, *Illinois Crime Victims Needs Assessment Survey* (Chicago: State of Illinois, November, 1984).
3. Herrington, Lois Haight, Assistant U.S. Attorney General. Letter to Members of Congress, Washington, D.C., July, 1985.



## Clergy Response

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Children and the Family





# Children, Family and Friends

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Christine Hershberger Miner

## **WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?**

One of the first questions that may occur to clergy when hearing of a violent home is, "What about the children?" It is automatic to ask, "Do the children know?" Children almost certainly have heard the abuse. As the child lies in bed, trying to sleep, the sounds of angry words and hitting may be more frightening than actually knowing what is happening. Being awakened in the dark of night is terrifying for most children, and abusive sounds are magnified by the darkness and secrecy surrounding it.

## **Parents Often Deny Violence**

Victims and abusers alike seem to fool themselves into believing that angry words, slamming doors, shoving and hitting cannot be heard throughout their home. It is highly unlikely that children, with their keen sense of hearing, have not heard the sounds of abuse when they were in the home or yard. It is also quite possible that the children have seen an abusive situation when their parents did not realize they were watching. Curious or frightened by the commotion, many children seek a vantage point to observe what is happening. Parents are often much too involved in their own conflict to notice the presence of their young children.

Parents frequently think that their children do not know that daddy batters mommy. If, for example, most of the violent episodes have taken place after the rest of the family is in bed, the parents may think it is a secret from the children. In addition, they may well be denying to themselves the seriousness of the violence in their relationship.

## **Feelings Common to Children in Violent Homes**

Children who have witnessed a parent being abused are filled with a variety of confused feelings including guilt, helplessness, anger, fear and hurt. Most often, they feel as if they are the cause of the violence. Occasionally, a child will ask about the violence she or he has witnessed. If the parents or other significant adults deny that beatings have occurred or treat them as insignificant, the child will be justifiably confused.

Children can certainly feel stress and tension rising in the home, yet may not have the verbal skills to describe their uneasiness. They may instead show their fears in other ways. One woman reported that her very small child got into the habit of looking her over very carefully before going out to play. He was looking for the signs of fear and tension that indicated another beating might occur in the near future. If, in his opinion, she didn't look okay, the child would not go outside.

Children may feel guilty that they are the cause of or are unable to stop the violence in their home. Often they think that only if they were somehow "better" children their mommies and daddies wouldn't hurt each other. Indeed, the stress triggering an abusive incident may be a toy left out or tears over a skinned knee. One teenager reported that whenever her parents argued, they would tell her that the only reason they married was that they were expecting her birth. Therefore, whenever there were problems in the home she assumed that it was her fault.

Children react to the stress in their homes in a variety of ways. Some make desperate attempts to make everyone happy in order to stop the violence forever. Some children react to these stresses by being "quiet as a mouse" in hopes that they won't be hurt if no one notices them. Other children respond by being extremely aggressive in an attempt to "get" others before "they" get me. In some families the children choose up sides. Some side with the strength of the abuser, hating the victim for being so weak. Others identify with the victim and try to prevent her from being hurt any further, frequently feeling that they are responsible for rescuing Mom.

Children need to understand that adults get confused too. Sometimes parents feel hurt or angry. It's okay to feel those feelings. What is not okay is hurting someone else. Children need to be repeatedly assured that they are not able to control their parents' actions, that the violence is not their fault, and that they are not responsible for protecting or rescuing anyone. Clergy will want to be particularly cautious not to mention anything that might be misunderstood as suggesting that children should try to stop the violence. It could very well endanger an innocent child's life.

## **Effects of Violence**

Strong emotional stresses affect children in a variety of ways. One significant effect is on the individual's ability to learn. According to one study,

Children between the ages of two and one-half and eight years who were staying in a shelter for battered women with their mothers showed significantly poorer cognitive, verbal, motor, and quantitative abilities than would be expected in a 'normal' population. They also demonstrated evidence of personality problems, with a tendency toward hostile-aggressive behavior.<sup>1</sup>

The stress of frustration and helplessness felt by children caught in violent situations leads to real anger. This anger may be expressed by lashing out at others, or it may be turned inward. In either case the child may have become convinced that he or she is a bad person.

## **Listening to The Story**

It is very important to listen to a child without minimizing her or his story or denying its reality. Adults tend to view children as overimaginative. Yet children are trying to make sense of a world with which they have very little experience. They may not have the verbal skills necessary to adequately describe what they have seen happening, or to express their own feelings.

Caring clergy will listen for a sense of what happened and will try to get a feeling for the emotional reaction of the child. Often it is helpful to repeat in one's own words exactly what the listener thought the child was saying. Letting the child correct these impressions may help clarify what is actually happening. It may be necessary to continue with this process several times before the clergyperson feels she or he has arrived at the truth and the child feels the comfort of being understood by someone who cares.

It is important to listen carefully and to gain the child's confidence. This is difficult to do if clergy are distracted by other demands on their time. If the conversation is interrupted, it is important to get back to the child as soon as possible. Do not feel that it is necessary to promise that everything will be "okay." It is highly unlikely that all the child's problems are going to vanish overnight. However, the process can be started by trying to help the child establish a network of people he or she can trust. Discuss relatives, neighbors, teachers, coaches, troop leaders, church members, and friends that might be able to help the child through difficult times.

## **Finding a Setting**

Many experts suggest that children act out with dolls or hand puppets what is happening in their home. This approach seems to work well with most girls and young children. However, in our culture many older boys and some girls have been taught that dolls are "sissy" or "for babies," so they have difficulty in expressing themselves in this way. Playing house with modular homes or small dollhouses with figurines occasionally helps young boys act out their feelings. The famous runner Jessie Owens suggested going for a walk with a young person as a way to find out her or his concerns. Playing cards or games together is another way of finding out what is on a child's mind.

In other words, listening to the story of a child or adolescent may require finding a setting where the story can be told. It is doubtful that a minister can simply sit down anywhere with a child and say, "Tell me about the violence in your home and how you feel about it." That would be awkward for everyone involved.

However, do not become overly concerned about the setting. If children have a need to tell their story and sense that you are willing to listen, they will confide in you. One minister was working on his car when a teenager stopped by to talk. Another minister was playing the guitar at a youth party. Church picnics, choir practice, before or after church all provide opportunities to open a discussion with a youth.

## **Reporting Child Abuse**

It is essential to maintain confidentiality when working with battered women and their children. However, if a child is also being abused, further action may be called for. If the names and dates of actual incidents of abuse to the child are discovered, the victim should be told the importance of calling the Child Abuse Hotline (often listed in the front of the telephone directory with other emergency numbers). While this is not a strict legal obligation for clergy, it is a moral duty to provide all the protection that is available for every minor child.

Remember, the children in a violent home are not necessarily abused, but many are. Lenore Walker found that one third of the batterers also abused the children physically.<sup>2</sup> In J. J. Gaylord's study of 100 cases of violent homes, 54 percent of the husbands beat both their children and their wives.<sup>3</sup> The child protection program in Milwaukee County,

Wisconsin, reports that there is a battered woman in one of every three referrals of a battered child.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, the likelihood of child abuse occurring increases in homes where spouse abuse occurs.

Clearly, a question that must be asked when working with children from a violent home is, "Were the children abused?" When faced with a frightened child from a violent home, it is essential that clergy be able to recognize the physical and/or emotional signs of abuse. Clergy will want to be in contact with persons who have training and specialized understanding of family abuse. It is essential for the children's and mothers' sakes that pastoral counselors and secular counselors not enter into competition with each other or confuse matters more by making contradictory suggestions.

### **Violence and Alcoholism Are Separate Problems**

The problem of battering is distinct and different from the problem of alcoholism. Yet some children live in homes where both problems exist.

In an article entitled "Incidence of Alcohol-related Domestic Violence: An Assessment" by Nannette Lehmann and Steven L. Krupp for *Alcohol Health and Research World*, it is reported that over 80 percent of the cases of wife-beating dealt with by Abused Women's Aid in Crisis in 1976 involved alcohol abuse by the husband. In a 1974 survey of one hundred wives of alcoholics, none of them previously identified as battered wives, it was discovered that 72 percent had been threatened, 45 percent had been beaten, and 27 percent had suffered potentially lethal assaults.

It is important to recognize that these studies indicate that there are homes where alcohol is not used and battering still occurs. Furthermore, there are alcoholics who have never abused their wives and should not be assumed to have done so. The problems of battering and alcoholism are indeed separate even though they may occur together.

Children need reassurance that they are not responsible for violence, and they are not responsible for alcoholism. The offending parent needs help from other adults. There are programs for batterers seeking to learn a nonviolent way of life, and numerous support groups for alcoholics seeking to recover from their disease. These are adult problems needing adult solutions, and children need adults to take responsibility for their own problems.

### **Self-Worth and Self-Confidence**

The religious community can provide many occasions for children to develop feelings of self-worth and self-confidence. Listening, empathetic adults can provide a strong network of support for children from tumultuous homes. Congregations have excellent opportunities in church schools, vacation church schools, catechism classes, confirmation classes and other religious education events to build self-esteem. An understanding instructor can prepare simple, meaningful tasks related to lessons that help each child feel the thrill of accomplishment and success. Choirs or puppet clubs may also provide these opportunities.

Building each child's self-image is a very important part of religious education. From their first days in the church's nursery all children are taught that God loves them. This witness to God's love is made by the clergy, the religious instructors, and all members of the congregation. That is, after all, the reason we care for and help the children in a violent home: God loves them just as God loves us all.

### **EXTENDED FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

In the ideal situation, extended family and friends provide a great deal of support for those who are dealing with violence in the home. Unfortunately, there are some traps that concerned family members may want to avoid. Four out of five persons who live in nonviolent homes may disbelieve the reality of the violence and underestimate its threat to the safety of their loved ones. Being unable or unwilling to accept the danger, family members may encourage a victim to stay in the home when it is very important for her and the children to seek shelter.

On the other hand, friends and family members who themselves live in violent homes may feel that family violence is just a part of life. "What's the big deal anyway?" "Why should someone else have it any better than the rest of us?" may be their reaction.

Victims and abusers may feel that extended family and friends who learn of the violence are taking sides. Decisions may be made that attempt to please everyone. Extraordinary efforts on all parts to maintain friendships and support systems may encourage persons to ignore the seriousness of violence.

### **The Influence of In-laws**

If relationships with in-laws are close, it may be difficult to admit any situations that might jeopardize those friendships. In-laws may be the strongest support systems available to members of violent families. This support may be withdrawn if family matters become public knowledge. On the other hand, in-laws may choose to simply ignore the

problem of violence. Whether the family is embarrassed by the violence, unconcerned about the dangers, or ignorant of anything that can be done to stop it, they may say or do absolutely nothing about the abuse.

Extended family may be entrapped as other helpers are. If they offer suggestions, advice or support that is rejected, they may also become physically or verbally abusive. If the match was disapproved of before marriage, it may be difficult for either member of the couple to admit to any problems. There is a very real fear that extended family members will say, "I told you so," or "You made your own bed, now lie in it."

### **Facing The Fact of Violence**

When people learn of violence in a relative's or friend's home, they will need assurances that it is better to face and deal with it constructively than to ignore it. Family members may need education on the existence of the cycle of violence. When families understand that the danger to their relatives is increasing daily, they will be less likely to feel that the problem is exaggerated and more likely to support efforts to bring the violence to an end. It is helpful to point out that other families have faced violence and learned new and better ways of dealing with anger.

While it is important for relatives and friends to acknowledge the violent relationship when they learn of it, it is also essential that they maintain confidentiality in all their communications regarding the victim or abuser. They may seek guidance from clergy or lay counselors regarding how they themselves can deal with the situation, but they must avoid talking with others about the violence unless it is expressly the wish of the victim.

### **The Danger of Conjoint Counseling**

Another danger is that well-meaning family or friends may pressure a couple to obtain conjoint counseling (couple counseling), rather than appropriate individual counseling. When violence is the problem, each partner needs to have individual access to a counselor.

If conjoint counseling occurs with a counselor who is unaware of the violent nature of the relationship, the counselor may assure both victim and abuser that they are free to say anything they wish in the session. If the victim reveals any negative information about the violence or her abuser, she may well be subjected to more severe violence after the counseling session. If she does not reveal any negative information about her abuser, he may use the opportunity to describe any real or imagined faults over and over, convincing both himself and his victim (and perhaps the counselor) that she does indeed deserve to be beaten. Before conjoint counseling is possible the violence must cease.

Counselors who are experienced with domestic violence will, to the extent possible, ascertain before beginning any counseling with a couple whether or not violence is a problem in their relationship. The safety of the victim must become the first work of the counselor, followed by new behavior patterns for the abuser. (See Chapters 3 and 7 for related information on conjoint counseling.)

### **Supporting The Efforts of Counselors**

Clergy need to be available to the victim, the abuser, and the family members. It may be wise to refer both the victim and abuser to different counselors in order that a suitable level of trust may be established for everyone involved. The pastor will then be in a position to encourage the family members to take the counseling seriously and support the decisions that will need to be made.

If the pastor chooses to do in-depth counseling, it may result in the victim and/or the abuser leaving the congregation. If the victim feels that the pastor is sympathetic to the abuser, she may feel that no one believes her or takes her seriously. Indeed, she may feel as though the congregation is judging her for having marital problems. If the abuser feels that someone else knows about the abuse, he may vanish out of embarrassment, shame or anger.

The pastor can provide additional support to the family by assuring them that he or she will maintain the confidential nature of any information they wish to share. If fears for the personal safety of a relative or friend are expressed, then the pastor may want to provide information on safety planning. For example, pastors may encourage the development of secret signal words, drawing particular window blinds to indicate safety or danger, planning escape routes, or storing duplicates of necessary legal papers, keys, and changes of clothing in a safe place.

Attempts to force a couple to stay together without dealing with the issue of violence do not eliminate the problem. They can, in fact, cause both victim and abuser to feel like failures, increasing the probability of future violence.

### **Community Education**

General education on domestic violence is an important service clergy can provide for their congregation. If family and friends are acquainted with basic knowledge about domestic violence, they will be better equipped to make

helpful decisions when they learn of a violent relationship. If family and friends support the victim in making her own choices and insist that the abuser accept responsibility for his own actions, they will be performing a real service. Also, simply knowing that the rest of the congregation is educated as to the issues of family violence can provide much-needed emotional support and encouragement.

Throughout the long process of dealing with violence in a family, it is important that the clergy remain supportive of the extended family and friends. Domestic violence is being faced openly and with new skills in our communities. Families and friends also need pastoral care and support as they face the reality of dangerously violent homes.

## NOTES

1. Bonnie Weston and Harold Martin, "Children of Battered Women," *Maternal - Child Nursing Journal* (Vol. 101, 1981), p.52.
2. Lenore Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1979), p.27.
3. J.J. Gaylord, "Wife Battering: A Preliminary Survey of 100 Cases," *British Medical Journal* (25 January, 1975), pp. 194-197.
4. Jennifer Baker Fleming, *Stopping Wife Abuse: A Guide to the Emotional, Psychological and Legal Implications for the Abused Woman and Those Helping Her* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979), pp. 272-273.





## Clergy Response

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Medical Advocacy





# Medical Advocacy

Donna Ginther

Responding to the medical needs of battered women is one of the most serious aspects of working with domestic violence victims. The victim's physical well-being depends on the ability of those who deal with her to assess the immediacy of her needs and to respond appropriately. As a member of the clergy, you may well be called upon to aid a woman who has recently been beaten. If so, you should be prepared to act as a medical advocate for her. The advocate's function is to serve as a liaison, helping the victim to receive timely care administered, ideally, by a sensitized, compassionate medical community. Remember, facilitators aid the process, but never superimpose their will on the victim.

## Crisis Care

Once confronted with a domestic violence situation, the first concern must be the safety of the victim; the second is her physical condition and potential need for medical attention. Remain aware that a fine line exists between responding in a caring and concerned manner and violating the victim's right to privacy. Unless the situation warrants immediate emergency attention, move cautiously. Your attitude and the victim's ability to trust you may determine her willingness to allow you to aid her.

**Ask, in a straightforward manner, the nature and extent of the victim's injuries.** Battered women are often unwilling to admit they have been physically injured. If she seems reluctant to discuss them, repeat the question later in the conversation. It is not uncommon for battered women to minimize the seriousness of their physical abuse. The form of the abuse and the location of her injuries may be embarrassing for her to describe. She may need to feel comfortable with you before she is willing to discuss possible injuries with you.

**Encourage a woman who has sustained a recent beating to seek medical attention,** since she may be unaware of internal damage which may have occurred. An equally important reason is to obtain a thorough medical examination which documents the abuse. Even if she is not interested in seeking legal remedies at this time, medical records can be crucial in establishing a pattern of abuse at a future date.

**Offer to accompany the victim to either a private physician or an emergency room.** Unless her injuries are severe enough to require emergency paramedic treatment, transporting her in your car will be less traumatic. Your sensitivity to her feelings and needs can determine whether she will consent to medical examination and treatment.

**Prepare the victim for the examination.** Abused women often attribute their injuries to accidental falls when seeking medical treatment. These misrepresentations can have serious consequences if later she seeks to prove a past history of abuse. Point out that the physician can be an important ally, so it is best if she is honest about the origin of her injuries.

**Provide for a supportive companion during the exam if the woman wishes it.** If you are a male minister, you will not be able to remain with the woman during the physician's examination. Suggest contacting a local domestic violence advocate, your wife, a female employee, or the church's victim advocate to accompany you and the victim. Base your actions on her response. If she is uncomfortable with the suggestion of an additional person accompanying her, assure her that her identity and circumstance will remain confidential. If she is still reluctant, do not pursue it. Remember, it is her decision as to with whom she shares her story.

## Medical Care and The Clergy's Role

In the emergency room and the physician's office, the clergy's role is to insure that the needs of the victim are met and that her rights are protected. As her advocate you can serve as a liaison between the victim and medical personnel.

**With the woman's permission, ask to speak privately with the physician in charge upon arriving at the medical facility.** Indicate that the woman has been beaten and request that she be assigned to an examining room immediately. Give the physician as many details as you know. If you can describe the actual incident, it will aid in the examination and diagnosis and save her from repeating her story again.

**Wait with the victim in the examining room until the physician arrives.** Hospital protocol may permit a person of the same sex to remain during the examination. Ask the victim if she would like you to step outside the room or to stay with her.

**Note any followup care or medication that the physician has prescribed.** The victim may not be able to remember the physician's instructions. If medication has been administered during the examination, ask if she can be left alone or allowed to drive a car.

**Remember, no one can be denied emergency medical care under federal law.** As of August 1, 1986, even if the victim has an outstanding bill or lacks medical insurance, she cannot be turned away.

**With the victim's permission, contact the hospital's chaplain if she requires hospitalization.** The chaplain can maintain periodic contact, continue the counseling you have begun or just be available on an emergency basis. Point out to the victim the advantage of having a "friend" on staff, but let her make the decision whether to contact the chaplain.

Give a copy of this manual to the hospital chaplains. Offer to discuss your experiences and concern with them. Discuss possible plans for coordinating your work within and outside the hospital setting.

The role of clergy as medical advocates can be a crucial one. Being sensitive to the rights and needs of battered women are essential if clergy are to truly serve them.

*Note: See Section on Hospital Policy in Chapter 8 for related information.*



## Clergy Response

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The Abuser



# The Abuser

Kathleen Quinn

Clergy are often understandably perplexed about how to respond to a batterer, especially if the man is an otherwise respected member of the faith community. Their confusion and uncertainty frequently result in denial of the problem, as previously discussed in this manual.

It is important to recognize one's own fear about working with an abusive man. Such fear and reluctance about confronting domestic violence are commonplace, but they must be overcome in order to minister to the violent family. To be prophetic means to take risks.

The first and primary goal of any intervention in a violent relationship must be that the violence cease. The physical safety of the victim should always be the top priority. Safety often requires that the parties be at least temporarily separated. Only after the violence has stopped can other problems in the relationship be addressed.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSERS

It is essential for clergy to realize that:

- A. Ninety-five percent of all cases of partner abuse involve a man beating a woman.
- B. The only person who controls the violence in the home is the violent party. While this may appear self-evident, in many cases the woman is blamed for her partner's abuses. Only he can control whether or not he attacks her.
- C. Abusers usually deny or greatly minimize both their violent actions and the damaging effects of their assaults. Clergy should expect to hear such comments as "there's really no problem," or "she is exaggerating."
- D. A majority of abusers (60-70 percent) also abuse alcohol. However, the alcohol abuse does not cause the violence. Rather, it serves as an excuse for it (for example, "he was drunk and didn't know what he was doing"). Both problems must be addressed, with the first emphasis being the victim's safety.
- E. Most abusers are violent in all of their intimate relationships with women. Many domestic violence programs have seen the second and even third partners of violent men. This underscores the fact that the violence is the man's responsibility, not the woman's.
- F. Abusers often have an array of problems, including low self-esteem, a history of being abused as children, extreme insecurity and possessiveness. However, addressing these problems is secondary to stopping the violence they direct toward others.
- G. Many abusers are otherwise charming and respected members of the community. Because of this, it is often difficult to accept that they brutalize their wives. It is important to remember that wife-beaters are found in every class, economic group, profession and religion.
- H. If violence in the home is permitted to continue, the children exposed to it are fifteen times more likely to be abused, and are at great risk of growing up to repeat the violent behavior they learn at home.

## WHY ARE MEN VIOLENT?

### Anger vs. Violence

It is critical that anyone working with violent families be able to distinguish, both for themselves and for the families, the difference between anger and violence.

Just as Jesus responded with righteous anger to the moneylenders in the temple, all of us experience the emotion of anger in response to injustice or unfairness. Anger itself is not wrong, but the ways in which it is expressed can be.

Certainly, anyone in a close relationship will at least occasionally become angry with his or her partner. The majority of people, including most men, do not respond to that anger by physically assaulting the other person. Most of us learn other ways to react, including arguing, shouting, slamming doors, not speaking, leaving for a while or, ideally, trying to talk it out.

No matter what the victim has or has not done, her partner has no moral or legal justification to strike her unless he is acting in self-defense. His anger may be understandable, but his violence is always inexcusable.

First let it be restated here what does not cause violence. Battered women do not provoke, deserve or enjoy being beaten, although they may stay in violent relationships for a variety of reasons. Violence is virtually always used by abusers to control the other person's behavior, resources (money, etc.), or body (as in sexual abuse).

### **Cultural Sex Role Stereotyping**

Abusive men tend to believe the historical cultural stereotype that men should possess and control their wives or female partners. When their partners fail to comply with their wishes, no matter how unreasonable, they then feel justified in "disciplining" them. The batterer's control often extends to all parts of the woman's life, including her relationships with other family members and friends, her access to money, her ability to work outside the home or even to leave the home for routine shopping trips.

### **The Role of Stress and Alcohol**

Stresses, such as unemployment or financial problems, may influence the frequency and severity of the abuse but stress does not in itself cause the violence. Again, as already noted in Chapter 5, above, alcohol abuse may be a contributing problem but it does not cause the violent behavior.

### **Abuser's Insecurity**

Abusers are generally insecure and frequently fear that their partners will be unfaithful. This insecurity often results in the man accusing his partner of infidelity. These accusations, although almost always unfair and sometimes ludicrous, are very dangerous for the woman because they often end in a violent attack. The man's lack of self-esteem generally increases both his emotional dependence on the woman and his efforts to control their relationship.

### **The Function of Remorse**

After being abusive many men, although far from all, are remorseful. During this "honeymoon" phase following a violent incident, the abuser may apologize and promise never to hurt his partner again. He may quit drinking, or return to church, or do whatever it is that she requests. The more steps the woman has taken to get out from under his control, the more likely it is he will be apologetic. His remorse and his promises, while perhaps sincerely felt at the time, are in fact another means of manipulating the woman.

Hoping to keep her family intact and often attempting to comply with the Christian ideal of forgiveness, the woman will often give him "one more chance." However, without some serious intervention, the old patterns are almost certain to return, and the violence is likely not only to continue but to escalate in both frequency and severity. It is extremely important that battered women and persons working with violent families understand the high probability of the violence recurring.

Before confronting or otherwise approaching an abusive man, the minister must have the express permission of the battered woman. The woman must be comfortable with and feel safe about the minister talking to her partner.

### **Avoid Conjoint Counseling**

Couples should never be counseled together if there is current violence in the relationship. Conjoint counseling is appropriate only when the violence ceases, as the physical threat makes it all but impossible for the victim to speak frankly. The victim and abuser should always be worked with separately until there is considerable assurance that the woman is physically safe. In fact, whenever a couple presents themselves for marital counseling, the partners should always be interviewed separately and asked if there is violence in the relationship. (Be aware that the abuser will virtually always deny the abuse even if true, and out of shame or fear a battered woman may also be reluctant to talk about the violence.) (See related information in Chapters 3 and 5.)

As a related caution, a counselor must be careful not to create a conflict of interest, which might happen if s/he is seeing both partners. A counselor must scrupulously assess the situation to be sure to be fair to both persons. In most cases one party should be referred to someone else.

### **Confront The Abuser's Violence**

The abuser must be confronted with the seriousness and the wrongness of what he is doing. As already stated, he will almost always deny or greatly minimize his violent behavior. If it is admitted, the abuser will generally blame his partner for "forcing" him to hit her (she nagged, spent too much money, flirted with another man, and so on).

Just as an alcoholic cannot begin to deal with his problem until he admits he has one, the abuser must accept responsibility for his own violent actions. He has to realize and admit that he chooses to attack his partner and that he can choose not to. Only then can he begin to change.

### **Do Not Let Scripture Be Misused**

Pastoral counselors need to be careful not to let an abuser use the Bible to justify his sinful actions. If the man claims that according to Scripture, wives are supposed to submit to and obey their husbands, he must be reminded that St. Paul calls for the mutual submission of spouses, and in fact calls upon husbands to cherish their wives' bodies as their own. (See Ephesians 5:21.)

### **Avoid Rescuing The Relationship**

It is also important for clergy to guard against the "rescuer" syndrome, and to be especially careful not to try to "rescue" the relationship at the price of the woman's physical safety. As in other counseling situations, the counselor's role is to provide caring but objective support, and to help the clients help themselves resolve their own problems.

### **BATTERERS' TREATMENT PROGRAMS**

The batterer's admission of responsibility for the violence is only the first step. The man must continue in treatment in order to confront the full range and origins of his controlling behavior. He needs to learn new attitudes toward women and family relationships, as well as to learn new skills in handling anger and stress.

Many communities now have batterers' treatment programs. Most often these are run by local domestic violence programs; however, they may also be provided by mental health agencies, private counselors, or other providers.

These programs are usually based on the group treatment model, with a number of men working together to confront and change their violent behavior toward women. Many programs have a set curriculum of from eight to twelve weeks, with the group working each week on a different issue, such as control or anger. Other programs may have a more fluid structure in which participants can sign up or drop out individually.

The field of treating violent men is a relatively new one, and the methods used are still developing. The effectiveness of various programs is still largely unknown; however, it is known that violent behavior is very difficult to eradicate. Nonetheless, for the sake of these men and, even more importantly, for the safety of their current and future partners, it is essential that such programs continue to develop and that new methods be tested.

Clergy should acquaint themselves with the batterer's services, if any, in their local area (many communities will not have any). The credibility of batterers' programs not provided by a domestic violence program should be verified with the local battered women's program wherever possible.

Unless the minister has been trained in working with violent men, abusers should always be referred to credible batterers' treatment programs where they are available.

### **COUNSELING THE ABUSER**

If no local batterer's treatment services are available, and you plan to counsel batterers, it is recommended that you read *Men Who Batter; An Integrated Approach for Stopping Wife Abuse* by Edward W. Gondolf.<sup>1</sup> *Men Who Batter* is an excellent resource which provides an in-depth analysis of abusive behavior and a detailed guide to working with violent men. The book describes an eight-step model of treatment. Because the issues are complex, it is recommended that you thoroughly educate yourself in the subject.

It should be noted that violent men seldom, if ever, agree to participate voluntarily in treatment programs. They generally will come only if coerced, whether by court orders or as a condition of keeping their families together (such as, their wives refusing to return until and unless the abusers undergo counseling). In the latter case, unfortunately, many men drop out of counseling shortly after they are reunited with their families.

Contributing to the abuser's reluctance to participate in counseling is his fear of losing control to the counselor, and his commonly-held opinion that counseling is "unmasculine." Thus the counselor must be able to establish trust while at the same time holding the abuser accountable and not accepting his rationalizations.

### **Identifying Feelings and Reducing Isolation**

According to Gondolf, violent men tend to be very controlling, both of themselves and of other family members. They will frequently not respond initially to anger-provoking situations but will keep their emotions checked until they explode in violence. Because their emotions are suppressed, abusers are generally unaware of the feelings which precede a violent incident. When asked what they were feeling before a beating they will respond, "nothing." One of the goals of counseling is to help the men recognize and label the range of emotions they experience.

As with a battered woman, it is enormously helpful for the man to realize that he is not alone, that many men struggle with these same problems, and that it is possible for him to control his abusive behavior. It is also effective to point out that his violent, controlling actions and his continued harassment of the woman will only drive her further away. It is



ironic that in trying to maintain their relationships by controlling every aspect of them, the men destroy the very persons and relationships they most want.

### **Referral for Alcohol and/or Substance Abuse Treatment**

In at least 50 percent of the cases of domestic violence, substance abuse is also present. Therefore, it may be necessary to refer abusers to area treatment programs. It is important that every community have treatment available not only for violence, but also for alcohol and substance abuse. These are two distinct problems requiring separate counseling procedures. However, each treatment provider will want to be aware of the other's existence, as some patients have arrested the disease of alcoholism without ever having their violent behavior challenged.

Effective counseling for abusers requires their sobriety. Important first steps include acknowledging violent behavior and the abuser's responsibility for his own actions. It is impossible to comprehend the significance of these acts with a mind clouded by chemical dependency. Again, however, the first priority must be to address and end the violence.

### **Precautions**

While most abusers are violent only toward their partners, it is possible that a man might become violent toward the counselor. Common sense precautions, such as always having other people within hearing distance when meeting with the abuser, should be taken. A male minister should take similar precautions when working with a battered woman, lest he be subjected to an abuser's accusations that the relationship is an illicit one.

### **CONCLUSION**

Working with abusive men is a complex and difficult task, but it is one which must be addressed if violence within the family is to be reduced. While in most cases a minister will not be called upon to do extensive counseling with a violent man, the role is an extremely important and powerful one. Together with the law, churches establish our cultural standards of right and wrong. By speaking out against domestic violence, by holding abusers accountable for their actions, and by supporting and assisting the victims of domestic violence, clergy can be very influential in stopping the cycle of violence.

### **NOTES**

1. Edward W. Gondolf, *Men Who Batter: An Integrated Approach for Stopping Wife Abuse* (Holmes Beach, Florida: Learning Publications, Inc., 1985).



## Clergy Response

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Church and The Community



# Church and The Community

Christine Hershberger Miner

It is most important that the religious community speak out with a loud and clear voice against domestic violence. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the stance of the congregation is firmly opposed to violence within the home. No one ever deserves to be hit. The home should be a haven of safety for all members of the family.

When speaking from the pulpit, clergy should frequently take the opportunity to state that people of faith stand squarely opposed to hitting, striking, beating, or harassing family members. The evil of violence should be clearly identified as a sin in the minds of the worshipers. In addition to the opportunities offered by the weekly service of worship, there are many other educational settings available for the congregation. Church school classes, membership classes, family nights, men's and women's fellowship groups all afford regular times for learning about the realities of domestic violence, how to minister to those affected by it, and ways to prevent future abuse.

## The Role of The Congregation

At the very least, church members need to be convinced that domestic violence is a prevalent problem in our society. Public expressions of disbelief in the existence of violent homes may discourage victims from sharing their true situations and their desire for support during the difficult decision-making processes. Furthermore, it is important that the congregation be educated in the dangers of making jokes about violence in the family. Laughter may prevent a victim from seeking needed assistance, placing her and her children in a life-threatening situation.

Additionally, church members should be sensitive to the dangers of obviously siding with the victim or the abuser. In cases where a divorce has occurred and the details are uncertain, it is wise to withhold judgment and to avoid taking sides. Whether or not violence was a factor in the divorce, it should be obvious to everyone that the family members affected by a divorce need continued spiritual comfort and support. On too many occasions, workers in domestic violence programs have seen victims in the process of making very difficult decisions about their own and their children's futures suddenly ignored or shunned by formerly close church friends. Just at the time when the congregation could be a strong source of comfort and community, it may suddenly take on a very judgmental character.

## Contacting Local Programs

For pastors and pastoral counselors, an important step in ministering with violent families is getting in touch with the local domestic violence programs in your area. (See Appendix F and G for listings of state coalitions and local Illinois programs.) Using church publications to publicize the phone number of the program closest to you helps the whole community know how to be supportive.

There are two varieties of local programs for victims. Shelter programs offer safe places where battered women and their children may stay while making decisions about their future; these programs also offer a full range of counseling and advocacy services. The other type is the walk-in (non-shelter) program where victims may talk with advocates who have knowledge and experience in dealing with domestic violence. Some walk-in programs have a network of safe homes where volunteers open their homes to victims who need a safe place to stay; others have arrangements with hotels to provide emergency lodging for battered women. Almost all walk-in programs can arrange for a safe place for a woman and her children to stay in an emergency.

A number of problems are common to victims of domestic violence. Among these are finding safety and shelter, obtaining medical treatment, dealing with the police and the legal system, and seeking a job or other means of financial support. Whether a victim decides to stay in her home, depart temporarily or permanently leave, a domestic violence program is helpful. Such a program is able to provide information on possible solutions to the woman's problems, giving her the data she needs to make an informed decision. It helps her overcome feelings of abandonment, loss, and isolation by introducing her to others who have been in similar situations. Most importantly, it offers a place of safety where decisions can be made away from physical danger. Therefore, it is important that the clergy and the local shelter or walk-in program maintain strong lines of communication. Unfortunately, there have been occasions where shelter workers and clergy have found themselves giving precisely the opposite advice. For example, a domestic violence worker may urge a victim to remove herself from a violent situation to a safe place where it is possible to think more clearly. If at the same time her pastor is urging her to return home to her remorse-

ful husband, or is carrying messages to her from her husband or other family members, it will seriously cloud her ability to make her own decisions.

It is important that clergy understand that temporary separation may be necessary to provide safety and to prevent further violence. Further, a violent marriage may indeed change if the abuser is helped to recognize his responsibility for the violence through counseling. Part of this process may well require temporary separation of the partners while the abuser learns new patterns of relating.

Clergy would do well to consult with domestic violence programs before giving advice to any victim or abuser. By developing and maintaining a continuing consultative relationship with shelter workers, the possibilities for communication breakdown during a crisis are greatly diminished. It may also be helpful to offer to discuss with shelter workers the biblical passages that are sometimes misused to defend family violence. Explaining the clear opposition of faith groups to domestic violence will be reassuring to domestic violence workers, and especially to victims who feel they have been abandoned by the church just when they need it most.

There are additional ways in which a pastor can provide valuable assistance to domestic violence programs. Every program needs the continued financial support of community organizations. This may be provided in several ways. An outright financial gift to the shelter to be used in whatever way the staff feels most important is always appropriate. Adopting one room in the shelter to furnish and decorate is another option. Giving a paper or canned goods shower is another possibility. Pastors should check with their local programs to discover what gifts would be most helpful at the time.

Volunteering to work a certain number of hours a week is an invaluable aid to domestic violence programs. Training is usually offered which enables volunteers to become familiar with the basic facts about domestic violence and to learn the helping skills necessary for working within a domestic violence program.

Accompanying shelter workers on visits to the hospital, the police station, and the court offers the support of the church within a community that may include those who are skeptical of the existence of domestic violence or tolerant of its continuation. Clergy can be instrumental in encouraging the legal and medical systems to develop policies that afford protection and safety for the victim as well as teach the abuser responsibility for his actions.

### **Hospital Policy**

The first place a battering victim may need to go after a beating is the hospital. The general attitudes of the local medical community about the criminality of domestic violence, and their attitudes towards the victim and abuser, will either impede or facilitate a victim's receiving the medical care she needs. As a respected member of the local religious community, a clergy member's involvement with the local domestic violence program can lend credibility to the needs and rights of the victim. Thus, your role as medical advocate should ideally include education of hospital personnel and physicians in your area.

The hospital administrator, director of nursing, the emergency room director and the hospital chaplain all have the ability to initiate and affect policy. Working in conjunction with the local domestic violence program, make arrangements with hospital staff to discuss the myths that surround domestic violence, the unique needs of domestic violence victims, the hospital's role in preventing future abuse and the importance of creating effective emergency room policy. Encourage the hospital's administration to sponsor in-service training on the issue of domestic violence and the role of service providers for all appropriate personnel. Your offer of assistance could be a crucial factor in their follow-through. Effective hospital policy needs to emphasize the fact that in some states injuries from firearms as well as non-accidental traumas are to be reported to the police. Battery is battery, whether it is done by a family member or a stranger.

Since battered women rarely volunteer the cause of their injuries, it is important for hospital personnel to maintain a degree of skepticism about the reported cause of a woman's injuries. Injuries and symptoms common to a battered woman should be known to emergency room staff. Regardless of staff suspicions, however, it is important to maintain a helping approach. Privacy should be maintained. Women should always be questioned about their injuries away from boyfriends or husbands. Every woman who is injured should be asked directly if her injuries were the result of a beating; if she answers no, but medical staff suspect differently, they may wish to offer a referral sheet for domestic violence shelters anyway. If she answers yes, it would be appropriate to refer her to the hospital social worker. Photographs of all visible injuries will be necessary. A Polaroid camera should be available in the emergency room or doctor's office for this purpose.

Physicians can play a special role in identifying and counseling battered women in their care. A supportive physician can encourage her to seek legal assistance and make a positive change in her circumstances. Together with the local domestic violence program, work with your county medical society to provide training and sensitization

to domestic violence. Once again, your position as a member of the religious community will lend credibility to the request.

### **Involvement with Police Training**

Similarly, it is very important for the police to receive training in the handling of domestic violence cases. As the laws dealing with domestic violence change, it is important that police are educated in appropriate enforcement of the new laws. Here again, clergy's involvement with the local domestic violence program can help legitimize the training police receive on the issue. If the police respond appropriately to domestic violence, the victim is more likely to follow through with legal remedies which discourage the abuser's behavior. Also, police need to know that women who are referred to domestic violence programs are more likely to complete legal proceedings.

In addition, clergy can have a positive impact on making police policies more responsive to victims of domestic violence. For example, the importance of rapid and appropriate police response to all domestic violence calls needs to be clearly outlined in police policy. (Recently an acquaintance of the author reported hearing a police officer tell the dispatcher that he "would take that domestic violence call as soon as (he) had gone on coffee break." Appropriate referrals should be given to the victims and arrangements should be made for transportation to shelters or medical facilities when necessary.

Police policies also need to deal with the issue of arrest of the abuser. Recent studies have shown that abuse is much less likely to recur if the abuser is arrested immediately. The previously cited study in Minneapolis, Minnesota, showed that violence recurred within six months in only 10 percent of the cases when the abuser was arrested. When advice was given but no arrest was made, violence occurred in 16 percent of the cases in the next six months, and when the couple was merely separated for eight hours, violence recurred in 22 percent of the cases.

Police reports should be filed as a matter of policy in all domestic violence cases so that a record of the continuing violence is available to the courts. These reports also serve to remind both the victim and the abuser of the serious nature of the situation.

### **Working with Prosecutors**

Prosecutors are the ones who determine how domestic violence cases are tried. They need to hear from clergy that there is community concern about how victims of domestic violence are treated. It is helpful if state's attorneys are familiar with persons who serve as advocates for victims. The victim who finds herself in court will be reassured if attorneys and advocates have developed a good working relationship. Clergy can encourage the development of such teams within their own communities.

### **Working with Judges**

Although judges are unlikely to have time or be willing to receive additional training in domestic violence cases, they may be responsive to sitting down with clergy and a domestic violence advocate and discussing general concerns about how domestic violence cases are handled in court.

Judges who inform abusers about the seriousness of their offense or who take the time to counsel victims can be very helpful in changing abusers' attitudes. If a good response has not been forthcoming from a particular judge, it may be helpful to serve as a court-watcher to document the judge's treatment of domestic violence cases over a period of time.

In any case, clergy should work with domestic violence programs in their area as these programs are likely to be in constant contact with the courts. Care should be taken to avoid offending the court, as other victims may suffer in the future. However, if clergy are able to enhance the effectiveness of the court, their time will be well spent.

Remember that clergy can have an enormous impact on all the above mentioned professions by influencing their individual members who sit in church pews every Sunday.

### **Child Care and Concern**

Adequate child care alternatives for the minor children of a violent parent are also very important. Victims who stay in the relationship may benefit from child care while they participate in the adult world outside the home. Those who choose to leave will need child care for the job hunt and during working hours. Child care providers who are aware of the family's situations can offer more assistance if they have a basic understanding of the problem of domestic violence. Historically, many churches have provided child care through the week. Clergy should see that their church-run child care staff are trained on the issue of family violence.

~~In addition to community support services for the victim and counseling services for the abuser, the local community needs access to support services for the children of violent families.~~ Unfortunately, there are very few support groups for children who have witnessed violence in their homes. Yet these children need to know that the violence is not their fault. They need to understand that violence is not the only way to live.

New methods of solving conflicts need to be introduced to the children of violent homes. If a support group is available in the area, a minister will be an ideal person to encourage the children's participation in it. If alcoholism has been part of the pattern of abuse, there may be a support group available for the children to deal with alcoholism. Parents or guardians may choose counseling as one option available to provide support to children who have experienced violence in their homes. Therapists who are familiar with domestic violence will be the most helpful.

✓ The community as a whole needs to provide educational opportunities for all concerned individuals to learn the facts about domestic violence. Domestic violence programs are excellent resources for speakers and audiovisuals. Churches and civic organizations may be able to provide many opportunities for speakers to discuss the issue of domestic violence. In addition, it is appropriate that all churches and civic organizations provide the wide range of support that domestic violence programs need in order to adequately serve the victims of domestic violence and to work towards its elimination.

9



## Clergy Response

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Transition





# Transition

Carol Findon Bingham

The doorway that leads clergy toward an effective, positive and grace-filled response was opened centuries ago when Jesus came to the aid of the woman being stoned and abused. Through that act, we have been offered a model of response to victims. Clergy have the means to step out in faith and to offer the comfort, support and grace of Jesus Christ.

Transition to a violence-free environment within the home is always a difficult process. The most important first step is to assist the victim in obtaining medical treatment if necessary and to find a safe place for her to stay. This need not be a permanent move, but it is only common sense that the violent behavior will cease if the two involved parties are not together. She will need some private time to sort out her feelings and to come to grips with the reality of abuse in her home. Clergy can help the woman find a local battered women's program where she can find shelter and can obtain professional assistance and counseling.

It is not uncommon for the woman to leave the abusive relationship and then to return soon after to the same situation. Numerous reasons may bring about her decision to return (see appendices and bibliographic references), but it is important to encourage her to continue counseling. If the abuser is willing, encourage him to begin counseling so that he can be an active participant in transforming the home environment. Unfortunately, many men refuse to enter counseling unless they are ordered by the court to do so. That requirement can sometimes be written into orders of protection under a state's domestic violence act.

If the woman returns to the abuser, she must be encouraged not to drop the charges and to retain a valid order of protection. Many times the abuser "sweet talks" her into dropping the charges with promises of better times. This would be an appropriate time for the minister to act as mediator or negotiator, to assist both the victim and abuser to see the reality of their actions and the consequences of further abuse. (It is important to remember, however, that individual counseling is preferred in most situations.) Both parties need the support of clergy, family and friends in order to work through these problems.

If the abuse continues, a separation of the victim and abuser must be encouraged while both are pursuing individual counseling. Months, even years, may go by before a reconciliation is possible; in some cases, a reconciliation may never come about. In such cases, forgiveness and compassionate understanding, especially by clergy, are most helpful in assisting the individuals to find renewal within their personal and spiritual lives. In addition to the normal grief of separation and divorce, both the victim and abuser have much personal "baggage" to work through because of the violence-filled relationship. Irrespective of one's beliefs concerning divorce, clergy are called to offer pastoral care and concern to sufferers, not to issue judgmental statements against separation and divorce. We must remember that the covenant of marriage was already broken with the first violent act.

It must be added that not all women need counseling. Some function as whole persons as soon as they withdraw from the violent environment. Still, it would be helpful for such an individual to attend support groups for domestic violence victims, if not for herself, then for other victims. Many domestic violence workers or volunteers were at one time victims of abuse. To place a former victim in contact with a local program would not only help her in her transition but would also assist the program and other victims.

The two important facts to recall during a period of transition are: (1) there is help available from various sources for victims, abusers and the children of violent homes; and, (2) in some, although far from all, cases a violent environment can be transformed to a violence-free environment. To assist a victim in finding help, clergy need to be aware of local laws, programs and other helping agencies, such as mental health, women's and private organizations. Before attempting to transform the violent environment, however, clergy need to be aware that there are no easy solutions to all of the problems which domestic violence brings upon those directly or indirectly involved.

Religious people are not immune from domestic violence. Communities of the faithful are not without abusive relationships. However, after centuries of silence, the veil has been lifted. We see more clearly the truth. Because our consciousness has been illumined, we can no longer hide behind rose-colored stained glass windows. We must acknowledge that violence unfortunately is an integral part of our world. As can be seen with the peace movement, people are responding faithfully. Humanity is beginning to examine and is attempting to come to an understanding of violence in our streets, violence between nations, and violence in households between men and women, adults and children.

How will you as clergy respond to domestic violence? Will you pick up the stone and throw it? Will you walk away? Both actions permit the abuse to continue. Or will you take a risk, speak out and act as Jesus did on the day he aided the woman being stoned? Will you call a halt to the violence?

The Illinois Interfaith Committee Against Domestic Violence is dedicated to helping the religious community focus on the problem of domestic violence and to developing strategies for responding to God's call of peace and justice for all people. The project to develop this clergy manual was undertaken because of the absence of information and resources for the religious community.

For assistance contact:

Illinois Interfaith Committee Against Domestic Violence  
Illinois Conference of Churches  
615 South Fifth Street  
Springfield, IL 62703

Other information may be obtained from:

Kathleen Quinn  
Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
937 South Fourth Street  
Springfield, IL 62703

The Rev. Marie Fortune  
Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence  
4250 South Mead Street  
Seattle, Washington 98118

Primary resources that can be obtained through the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence are:

- A. *Working Together to Prevent Sexual and Domestic Violence*. This quarterly newsletter is both a teaching tool and a means of disseminating information about regional and national prevention efforts.
- B. Fortune, Marie M., *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin — An Ethical and Pastoral Perspective* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), pap. \$9.95 (ISBN 0-8298-0652-0).
- C. Fortune, Marie M., *Sexual Abuse Prevention: A Study for Teenagers* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), pap. \$3.95 (ISBN 0-8298-0711-X).
- D. *The Speaking Profits Us: Violence in the Lives of Women of Color*. This is a monograph of essays.
- E. "A Commentary on Religious Issues in Family Violence" by Rev. Fortune. This article was originally published in her workshop manual.
- F. *Sexual Contact by Pastors and Pastoral Counselors in Professional Relationships*. Prepared by the Washington Association of Churches.

## Carol's Story

Carol Findon Bingham

I would like to start at the beginning but I honestly cannot pinpoint a time which can be considered a beginning. Nor can I identify the causes which moved me toward a relationship which by far proved to be the most horrendous time of my life. There seems to have been numerous events which could have led me to the decision to enter the legal contract of marriage on February 15, 1964 which literally transformed my life and personality. I use the word "contract" because there never existed a marriage covenant in the theological sense. To my new partner God was an outsider who blessed the contract! The legal sealing of this contract created an inescapable prison of servitude and oppression.

Ironically, I had hoped to escape the already existing bonds at home, a hope complicated by the fact that my father was dying of cancer. I wanted to flee the hell and suffering of home, to leave the reality of pain, and to begin a new relationship of ease, comfort and love — so I thought. I did not see reality. The romantic love of the early months of our relationship was never nurtured to maturity and never moved out of the sentimental, emotional and infatuation stages. It died quickly after the marriage ceremony as I was exposed to the demonic forces of the world and to the reality of an abusive husband.

I can still remember the feeling of unbelief and shock that engulfed me during the early weeks of marriage. Even on the honeymoon there was an incident of too much alcohol and subsequent abuse. I remember the lost feeling, a feeling of being alone and isolated from the world. I looked at every church building and religious symbol and asked, "Why, God, why?" I suppose my parents thought that anything would be better than the disease and suffering at their home. But they could never know the disease, suffering and hell of physical violence in marriage. The contract of marriage had been violated. I had experienced the rape of a marriage. Susan Brownmiller describes rape as "a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear."<sup>1</sup> The physical act of rape is one small part of a total rape of a marriage in which the woman is abused. Intimidation and fear never subsides. Being degraded and possessed like a piece of property is part of the abusive relationship. The life of an abused woman is damnation on earth.

At first, in order to escape what was happening to me, I simply denied the reality of suffering. It was the Christian duty to suffer (1 Peter 2:20). A Christian must always react to violence with nonviolence because suffering is nothing compared to what Christ did for us. The ultimate suffering was Jesus Christ's act on the cross. We wear our cross around our necks to remind us of this fact. But Jesus' suffering was three hours and death was his reward. His healing, release and resurrection was sure to come. My suffering was unending at the time, every hour of every day! I looked to death for release from my hell and even considered suicide as the ultimate salvation. There was no way for me, a nonviolent Christian, to teach a violent non-Christian man the virtues of a nonviolent Christ! "God, how could you do this to me?" Jesus' suffering seemed so little compared to this. My theology simply split into so many fragments. I was supposed to reconcile to the life of this corrupt marriage, to continue in this suffering situation so that my husband could be "saved," to love no matter what the evils seemed to be. I was lost in theological confusion. I began to isolate myself from God and my few remaining friends. I tried to bear the cross.

I had always been aware of his heavy drinking. I also enjoyed pre-dinner cocktails, but never to the point of losing control of my physical actions. I wanted always to be in control of my life. But now I was at the command of another, controlled by another person, involved in a totally aberrant condition of marriage which I had once thought could never be possible. How could God, my family, pastor and friends allow me to get into this mess? In my anger I blamed others. I became extremely furious with everyone and everything around me. I learned to cuss and swear like a trooper. "God led me into this," I thought; how could I be so blinded not to see the truth? I had made a choice to marry. I became more angry with God and myself and the people with whom I associated. I was fragmented and dying in this relationship, having lost all self-esteem and personal identity. I did not know what to do. There was no place for me to go.

On a number of occasions my husband inflicted bodily harm during my pregnancy. I became fearful for the unborn child and appealed to his brother in the fall of 1964. I asked him to come and calm my husband if a time arose that I needed his help. The time came soon after and the vicious, vulgar and obscene words and actions were turned on his brother. I threatened to call the police. He yelled that he'd kill me if I ever did that. His brother did not know what to do. He too became fearful of what my husband would do in his drunken stupor. But then the attacks of battery began to come at sober times; perhaps because someone else now knew, or perhaps his condition was deteriorating, or perhaps because I was pregnant. I don't really know. He obviously had difficulties both in his family relationships and with his

responsibilities at work. I suspected that his parents made many decisions for him as he grew to adulthood because he could not make decisions concerning his life and work. His self-image of inadequacy seemed to be driving him to the "edge." He had been an absolute genius concerning the electrical field of work but remained the laborer journeyman doing another's schemes and layouts. His frustration got the better of him and he could not control his temper. He became irrational in thought and actions whether he was sober or drunk.

Fits of uncontrollable anger were not uncommon. I could not leave him alone with my infant son too often for fear of returning to find him out cold with a lit cigarette, and beer and alcohol spilled all over the kitchen and den. I could not go to my mother to talk, for she had her own problems trying to carry on the family business alone. I could not go to my pastor, for he suggested reconciliation, and I could not reconcile myself to a beast. Besides, I needed to be reconciled to God first. This pastor married us, and surely he gave a blessing to the marriage. I began to think there was something wrong with me! Perhaps I just did not adjust to married life. I simply didn't want the pastor to know about my inadequacies. I had to come out of this mess myself. There was no place to turn — except to God. In desperation I cried, "God, help me!" This was my constant prayer. In that surrender I was able to begin to make plans. I had to live this out. I had to get my mind and spiritual self in order — and prepare to be free of violence.

I came out of my isolation and looked to Christ. Jesus did not come to bring peace, but a sword. Jesus came to cast fire upon the earth. Jesus the Christ created a new realm for the violent who seize it by force. Jesus was not contented with flesh and blood. I began to realize the demonic forces which surrounded me. One late evening my husband returned home in a delirious state. I was at the desk facing the wall and ignored the usual disgusting entrance of shouts and obscenities. He sat on the couch and began to talk, yell, and scream at the three groups of toys on the floor. To him they were real — perhaps real in spirit — perhaps hallucinations. I felt evil all around. I had learned that it was best for me to be as quiet as the furniture during these times. "Oh God . . . now what?" Then I felt an uncanny heaviness descend onto the room and fall like a millstone around my neck and shoulders. I was frozen at my seat. Darkness seemed to be all around and I was scared beyond all comprehension. I began to sense demonic spirits in the room. No doubt these were the objects of his conversation. He would talk . . . then listen . . . laugh . . . argue . . . agree . . . It was like a one-sided telephone conversation which changed from cordiality, to anger, to supplication. All emotions were evident. I began to realize this was an occurrence which had never happened before and thank God it has never happened since. Perhaps I was going crazy; I thought, "If I do get out of this one, maybe I should commit myself!" I prayed, "Oh God, you can take this away. In Jesus Christ's name I beg you to dispell these fears and remove the evil which surrounds me." As soon as I said "Amen" all things changed. A feeling of light-headedness began to overwhelm me with awe. I felt as if I was standing over a fan blowing upwards, yet I felt no wind or even a light breeze. I turned to look at him and found him quiet and out cold on the floor. I had never witnessed an answered prayer with such dramatics! I was overjoyed . . . maybe I was crazy . . . I didn't know what to believe except that I had witnessed the power of God and could hardly believe it. I remembered something that I learned in church school, that God had authority over the demons of this earth. I also realized that, with the abusive use of alcohol, one's consciousness is lowered to such a level whereby free will is totally destroyed and demonic possession is possible. I began to realize that only God could help me overcome the oppression of this marriage. (I am not so sure that this would be true for all women in an abusive relationship.) I became stronger in my faith and began to reconcile myself to God, not to my spouse as was suggested by counselors and my pastor. Reconciliation between me and my spouse was totally out of the question. Reconciliation must first occur with a person and one's relationship to God. This is the premise to God's atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. My spiritual life needed to be renewed and I sought reconciliation to God through Christ. God's grace was to liberate me from this hell. I needed to commit myself first to God. I could not reconcile myself to an already corrupt, broken, and fallen marriage contract which had been doomed in legalities made by humanity. My new covenant with God became a reality so that I could grow spiritually and personally.

I had started private organ lessons with a professor at a local university, initially as a therapeutic activity. Soon after I began graduate studies and a relationship with the world outside and to other people, so that I could prepare to move on. Yoga exercises relaxed my body, and spiritually I was renewed through Christian meditation. At first these experiences were escape methods, but later they became my strength. The process of moving on to be free had begun. I gained more confidence in myself and realized that I didn't have to subject myself to this kind of oppressed existence. My brother had taught me some self-defense moves when we were teens and I started to use them in order to survive. I began to fight back. The recollection of these moves and my courage to use them was a God-send! It was not uncommon for me to hit him in the groin in order to prevent my body from being slammed into the wall. Once I was even proud that I knocked him down to the floor after I had followed through with a chop to the back of his neck as he bent over because of the pain in his groin. Needless to say I did not stay around to see him get up. Now as I look back, I

don't know if I could ever do it again unless I felt my life was in danger. I now laugh as I image the picture of me running and yelling to God to keep him down until he passed out.

I became more aware of the times to hit or not to hit because I understood when he would retaliate. Jacques Ellul in his book *Violence* states that violence is not good, legitimate or just, but its use by a Christian is "condonable" when a person is in despair and "sees no other way out" or when a "hypocritically just and peaceful situation must be exposed for what it is in order to end it." I was always troubled because I fought back. I had had difficulty justifying my actions. When I read this statement it leaped off the page and gave me a justifiable reason for my responsive acts of violence. I reacted with violence and retaliated with verbal battery in order to get out of an oppressed existence. At the time it simply was a gut reaction to the situation. My anger was no longer suppressed. Now it was being expressed.

In the month of August 1967 there were many rumors of racial violence in the area. My husband had an intense hatred for Blacks and after he had become extremely intoxicated, he started to make plans to make sure that no one would set foot on his property. He loaded the .22 rifle and became obsessed with hate and anger. I became extremely alarmed at his violent threats and begged him to put the rifle away. In the struggle the rifle went off as my back was turned. I was not injured but the exact happenings are still blacked out in my memory. I immediately had fear for Jim who was in his crib asleep upstairs. I ran to him not looking to see if my husband was hit or not. I grabbed the crying child and ran through the smoke-filled rooms to the car and drove to my husband's parents' home. I pleaded with them to please assist me in committing him to a psychiatric hospital. His father went to the house and returned an hour later to say that everything was cleaned up . . . he was sorry . . . he wouldn't do it again . . . All was calm. I then realized that I could never get help from them, especially if they continued to overlook the obvious and to cover up their son's actions.

To this day I do not know why I ran to his parents' home. Could it have been the need to be rescued or was it an action of returning the child back to the womb? I did not want to be stuck with their misfit. This incident was another turning point. I was more determined to get out. But I had to get him out so that I could claim the house.

In time I was able to persuade him to sign over the deed of the house and the car title to me even before I sought a lawyer for the divorce. I remember appealing to his confused state of mind that his actions might harm Jim and Dave, our two sons. It would be better for them if I had the house and car in my name. I must have badgered him for over a year. Under the state law at that time I could have been sued for divorce because of desertion if I had moved out. I would lose everything. Therefore, I needed to find other solutions. I needed the house and the car for survival for me and the children. It was easier to get them now than after the divorce papers were filed. When this was accomplished I could convince him to leave.

One time I returned from choir practice to hear the boys crying upstairs in their rooms and him yelling hysterically downstairs. I discovered both doors locked and chained. When he finally heard me pounding at the doors he called out obscenities calling me "a bitch of a whore, who whores around the church when you should be singing" and "get out and leave me alone with my boys." Fearing for the boys' safety, and asking God, "Now what do I do?" I broke the window of the backdoor. I cannot remember how I did it. After I opened the latch and chain, I pushed him out of the way and ran to the boys. After I got them quiet I realized that it had become very quiet downstairs. I went down to find him out cold on the floor where he had landed. Needless to say I left him on the floor.

The mornings after became important. Because of the alcohol black-outs, he could not remember anything of the night before. I seized the opportunity to return verbal abuse. I wanted him to be degraded and intimidated in his weakness and I jumped at every chance! I really became proud of my response. I was no longer going to accept the role of submission to violence. I began to feel good about myself and began to see that I did not have to subject myself to this treatment. I could physically, emotionally, and verbally fight back. I wanted to break his psychological rule over me. I was not going to remain a weak person and be oppressed in this demonic existence. I was going to get out! I now had the car, house, and the boys. I knew we could make it on our own. If I could get through this hell I could easily make it alone in society. I understood that the transition would be difficult, but God would be with me. I shed many tears and my knees were sore with hours of praying.

A change seemed to be evident in the relationship. The stages which I had witnessed during the abusive years seemed to be transferred from me as the oppressed one to him the oppressor turned oppressed. I doubt if the reasons for this reversal can be fully discerned, as I was acting out for my need for survival. I have given thanks to God for the strength and courage. I do not advocate this method to all in a battered situation unless the woman knows her own emotional and physical strengths. The abused woman must overcome the emotional and physical rape of her body, mind, and soul. I tried to convince him, his family, and friends that he was sick and in need of much professional help, and that without their assistance nothing could be accomplished. Perhaps his sickness was also wrapped up in the evils of society, at least I cannot deny that this is possible. His sickness was cancerous and spread to all



whom he touched and loved. In this way we are all at fault. We who were close could possibly have collectively found help for him. But the parents, pastor, counselors, and police did not understand the complexities of an abusive partner. No one had any suggestions or answers. My solution was to escape . . . to move on with my life.

I faithfully lived a life of constant prayer, although selfishly the prayers were addressing my needs in the family. I found solace in the Psalms, especially Psalm 55:4-8:

"My heart is in anguish within me,  
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.  
Fear and trembling come upon me,  
and horror overwhelms me.  
And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest;  
Yea, I would wander afar,  
I would lodge in the wilderness,  
I would haste to find me a shelter  
from the raging wind and tempest."

The moment of enlightenment came after I was fixed for weeks upon Luke 9:1-5 and Luke 10; Jesus instructs his followers to go out as lambs in the midst of wolves and some will not receive the Word. In the story of the Good Samaritan I saw myself as the wounded one. And oh how I longed to be Mary at the foot of Christ, when in reality I was Martha anxious and troubled. Jesus' words of instruction were spoken to me, "But whenever . . . they do not receive you, go . . . and say, 'Even the dust . . . that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless know this, that the (Realm) of God has come near.'" (VS. 10-12.) These words were my ticket to get out of the vows of marriage. I was being redeemed!

I managed somehow with God's help to convince him to move out in November, 1968. I was able to secure a teaching position in February, 1969 and to find a daytime care-giver for the boys. The divorce came in August, 1969 with absolutely no problems. Throughout the period of separation he attempted suicide a number of times but never succeeded. He never sought therapy and did not show up at the court proceedings. His visits to see the boys became less frequent as time went on until they simply ceased.

I did not come out of this marriage without scars. I had been under the care of a physician throughout, although I was able to refuse drugs. Emotionally I was a wreck and still today I find it easy to shed tears because of the pain of some memories. I consider myself a strong-willed person with a deeply spiritual centering on God. My two boys have overcome many obstacles and I trust God will help them in their adjustments in life as I have experienced God's grace in mine.

After the divorce, I was alone for three years, teaching school, continuing as a part-time student at the university for my master's degree, having a church position as organist and director of music, and having about a dozen private piano and organ students. And of course I was both a mother and a father to the boys! I learned to live and to love and trust again. My faith and commitment to God became stronger. I could not have survived without God's grace and sustenance received weekly at the Lord's Supper. With God's grace I reconciled myself to God and became completely free. I learned how to survive and be free of the corruption which had enslaved me. I was new, renewed and liberated; redeemed and moving on toward salvation.

I had pushed many of the violent experiences deep into my memory. Some are still not clearly recalled. I believe that if I had retained all of the experiences in the forefront of my mind, I would either have been dead long ago or been committed to an asylum totally embittered. I have experienced the battered woman's mental, emotional, and physical pain. I can relate to the abused woman as she examines her existence and tries to understand the unanswerable questions. The search convinces the woman that she is not in a hopeless situation. My death was in the alienation from God, and my rebirth was in the process of renewal and reconciliation. The process of dying had to be reversed, and in this reversal lies the hope and the healing toward wholeness. I was moved to be reconciled in spite of the suffering. My suffering had a purpose as Christ's suffering had a purpose. At the time I had no idea what that purpose was. The process of reconciliation began during my suffering as it had begun in Christ's suffering. Reconciliation is to be made to God! Reconciliation is initiated by God and I responded to God. No one of this earth should call upon a woman in a battered situation to reconcile to the abusive partner! No pastor has the right to insist upon reconciliation where the evil of domestic violence is present.

Today, more than twenty years after it all started, I am in a different state with a new husband and a third child, Diana. I am a United Methodist pastor, committed to ministry against domestic violence. Life is much different and very comfortable. The boys are well adjusted to their adopted father. In fact, Dave knows no other. Their natural father died three years ago. We have been forgiven and we have forgiven him. If we knew then what we know now perhaps there would have been another outcome to this story. I am still the romantic idealist searching for the ideal and I realize that in reality there is no ideal apart from God. As I look back at the struggles of those years, I have mixed feelings. I am angered by the clergy and counselors who insisted on reconciliation within a devastating hell of a violent relationship. Many have looked to God through stained glass rose-colored windows and have seen the glory of the resurrection only to overlook the suffering of the cross. Reconciliation has come through the act of God on the cross. This act was a part of the whole Christ event of the Pascha; the suffering and the glory — one cannot occur without the other. In suffering there is glory and in the glory of Easter there is the cross of suffering. Reconciliation to God comes through this Christ event. The Christian is called to a covenanting relationship with God through Christ in this saving act.

When the clergy use the word reconciliation in counseling a battered woman, they assume that the woman has been a part of a covenanting relationship between the partners. It is believed that Christ is the bond of unity and that each is subject to one another out of reverence to Christ (Ephesians 5:21). Paul also insisted that a marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian is a union of Christ and a means for conversion (1 Corinthians 7:14a). Yet can the clergy understand the abusive relationship? Are the clergy acting as a god judging the marriage in question? Are the clergy inferring that all marriages are ordained by God and bonded and sealed in the wedding ceremony? Have the clergy forgotten that the world is corrupt because of "The Fall"? Have the clergy forgotten that the wedding was originally a pagan ceremony and that the wedding service did not take place inside the church until the English Reformation?

Battered women seem to be always outside the door. And the door is still locked. The church door is not often opened to our problems. But there is another door through which one can pass, the secular door of shelters. Thanks to Erin Pizzey (*Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear*, 1974) and Del Martin (*Battered Wives*, 1977), and the work of thousands of dedicated persons in the battered women's movement, the problems of the battered woman and her dependent children and their needs are becoming known. Through the writings of the Rev. Marie Fortune and the Rev. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite (see Chapter 1 and Appendix B), the church is being transformed. More women are crying for help and the church is only beginning to listen. Again I thank God! There was nothing for me in my need during those years of abuse, no shelters, no people to talk to, no help of any sort! Now there is some help, yet still not enough to supply the relief which is needed to overcome this evil which seems to be a part of society.

Our world is indeed a violent world. We see it daily in the media. Violence against women, however, is still a hidden family secret. Where have all the abused women gone? They are in every religious community. When are we going to unify across denominational lines and address this evil? When are we going to stop placing blame and begin to actively pursue a course of eradicating the violence in the home? As we have become more aware of child abuse, we have initiated new programs and projects in our churches and synagogues. Now we must respond with ministry to the abused woman.

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## NOTES

1. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1975), p. 439.
2. Jacques Ellul, *Violence* (Cincinnati, OH: Cross Roads Books, 1969), p. 133.



## Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite

All day long, every day, women are verbally intimidated, battered, injured, and killed by the men they live with. If, as Susan Brownmiller has said, "rapists are the shock troops of patriarchy," then batterers are the army of occupation. This chapter is concerned with the way in which this climate of violence that touches women's lives affects biblical interpretations.

All women live with male violence. A survey conducted by the National Division of the United Methodist Church's Program of Ministries with Women in Crisis in 1980 and 1981 indicates that one in every twenty-seven United Methodist women had been raped, one in every thirteen had been physically abused by her husband, one in every four had been verbally or emotionally abused. Of the respondents, both male and female, one in nine knew of a close friend or relative who had been raped, one in six knew of physical abuse, one in five knew of emotional abuse.<sup>1</sup>

While the authors are aware of the limitations of their survey, as a random sampling of Protestants the survey seems to indicate that even scratching the surface of women's lives reveals the daily presence of violence.

The authors also observed, "Denial runs deep." Their report has met with "disbelief and an amazing capacity to rationalize the findings."<sup>2</sup> Denial is the way to the continuation of the abuse of women. Consciousness of the violence against women with which we all live every day is the beginning of its end.

A feminist biblical interpretation must have this consciousness at its center. The Christian scriptures are inextricably interwoven with this history of the belief systems which support the view of women as scapegoats. In *Violence Against Women*, Emerson and Russell Dobash have a chapter on the relationship of biblical material to the problem of spouse abuse, in which they call women "the appropriate victim." They believe this problem requires intensive examination of history for the structures that support the legitimization of wife as victim.

The seeds of wife beating lie in the subordination of females and in their subjection to male authority and control. This relationship between women and men has been institutionalized in the structure of the patriarchal family and is supported by the economic and political institutions and by a belief system, *including a religious one*, that makes such relationships seem natural, morally just, sacred.<sup>3</sup>

There is apparent division over the question of whether the location of the authority (warrant, cause, justification) of a feminist interpretation of the Bible is in the text or in women's experience. I believe it is impossible to make this distinction with any clarity because women's experience in Western culture has been shaped by a patriarchal culture [145-146].

Following a presentation I gave on the Bible and battered women in New York in October 1982, one member of the audience raised the question, "Why deal with the Bible at all?" But as anyone who works with abused women knows, this is not an option. Battered women frequently bring their religious beliefs to the process of working through a battering relationship. Phone calls to shelters often begin with the phrase, "I'm a Bible-believing Christian, but . . ." We begin to develop a feminist interpretation because the Bible is a part of the fabric of the oppression of battered women [129].

In the early 1970s I became involved as a pastor counseling abused women. I received calls from some women who were experiencing abuse but were reluctant to try to change their situation because they had been told the teaching of the Bible prohibited their protest. I organized Bible studies with some of these women, and I have continued this work in several locations. Many of the examples that follow are from such groups.

*Volunteer to do a Bible study - at a women's shelter*

### Feminist Method

A feminist method does not always come first chronologically. In Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza's landmark work *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, method appears first in the volume, but it does not come first in the development of her thought. It was living with the texts themselves in the midst of the contemporary

women's movement that shaped her method of investigation. Precisely because it is a method of investigation, it is a process for discovery of what has been hidden.

Moreover, a history of the use of biblical materials must become a part of the interpretation. John Cobb has noted that critical study recognizes, and indeed emphasizes, the socio-historical context in which the text functioned in the early church.<sup>4</sup> Feminist biblical interpretation has added a recognition of the patriarchal context in which the text functioned. But the text is still functioning, so to speak, and the patriarchal view that formed part of the formulation of the text is in turn supporting and supported by the text. All that history must become part of a feminist interpretation of the Bible.

Likewise, the origin of women's suspicions of the biblical interpretation of their situation is *both* the text *and* their life experience. Method emerges in this process of interrogation between text and experience. The key is that this process of interrogation proceeds over time.

Work with abused women is a process of support in which women who are physically safe, perhaps for the first time in many years, find self-esteem through affirmations of the gifts of women, through taking control of their lives, and through claiming their anger and finding in that anger a source of strength to act and to change. This process takes time. It cannot happen overnight.

Likewise, the development of a feminist method of biblical interpretation takes time. In Western philosophy, thought has been deemed a timeless, eternal absolute. But if that were the case, nothing new would ever emerge from human consciousness, because it would have to emerge full-blown. Plato wrestled with this problem in the *Meno* and decided that the way we come to know anything new is by remembering it from a formerly perfect state of knowledge before birth. Today we follow an investigative, scientific model of deduction, which holds that thoughts proceed from first principles toward a logical conclusion. This is the grip of positivism, which has held us in obeisance to science for more than two centuries.

In fact, it appears more likely that we think by analogy. When we want to ask about the unknown, we ask, "What is it like?" We learn something new both from the similarity and from the dissimilarity. The tension of the dissimilarity probes us to ask again. Thought moves by analogy and it moves through time. We have to live with something for a while before we can move on.

Over time, women come to varying levels of interpretation of biblical materials. Each of these levels is possible with the whole corpus, and all are necessary in order to deal with the varying attitudes toward women within the Bible.

### **The Liberation in The Text: Finding Self-Esteem**

The support given by programs and shelters is essential so that an abused women can begin to see her life in a new way. Through her research, Lenore Walker has described the battered woman as follows:

1. Has low self-esteem.
2. Believes all the myths about battering relationships.
3. Is a traditionalist about the home, with strong beliefs in family unity and the prescribed feminine sex-role stereotype.
4. Accepts responsibility for the batterer's actions.
5. Suffers from guilt, yet denies the terror and anger she feels.
6. Presents a passive face to the world but has the strength to manipulate her environment enough to prevent further violence.
7. Has severe stress reactions, with psychophysiological complaints.
8. Uses sex as a way to establish intimacy.
9. Believes no one will be able to help her resolve her predicament except herself.<sup>5</sup>

Abused women who receive support begin to learn that they have self-worth and to experience their anger as legitimate. Yet these women believe what they have been taught the Bible says about their situations: that women are inferior in status before husband and God and deserving of a life of pain. One woman said, "God punished women more." (See Gen. 3:16.) [114].

Frequently, women with strong religious backgrounds have the most difficulty in accepting that the violence against them is wrong. They believe what they have been taught, that resistance to this injustice is unbiblical and unchristian. Christian women are supposed to be meek, and claiming rights for oneself is committing the sin of pride. But as soon as battered women who hold rigidly traditional religious beliefs begin to develop an ideological suspicion that this violence against them is wrong, they react against it.

In workshops for persons who work with abused women, I have found that most social workers, therapists, and shelter personnel view religious beliefs as uniformly reinforcing passivity and tend to view religion, both traditional Christianity and Judaism, as an obstacle to a woman's successful handling of abuse. Unfortunately, they also say that many strongly religious women cease attending shelters and groups for abused women when these beliefs are attacked!

For women whose religious beliefs include extremely literal interpretations of the Bible as the norm, no authority except that of the Bible itself can challenge the image contained in these texts of woman as silent, subordinate, bearing her children in pain, and subject to the absolute authority of her husband. Yet in Bible study groups, these women can learn that the scriptures are much more on their side than they dared hope. They can become suspicious of a biblical exegesis that is a power play used against them. The process of critical interpretation is often painful and wrenching, because new ways of looking at the Bible have to be learned. But it is also affirming, because one is telling abused women, "You have a right both to your religious beliefs and to your self-esteem."

The core insight with which to begin such a process of interpretive suspicion is that the Bible is written from the perspective of the powerless.<sup>6</sup> The people of Israel, God's chosen, are a ragged band of runaway slaves. God, by identifying *this* people as chosen, is revealed as a God who sides with those who are out of power. It may be that to be out of power is a continuing metaphor in scripture for those who are especially valued by God.

Several types of texts have proved especially helpful to abused women. The theme of God's care for widows and orphans can be helpful in demonstrating that those who are oppressed by societal structures are especially dear to God. A widow in Israel was effectually without economic support and a nonperson in the eyes of that society. The children of a widow, because they lacked this economic support, were considered orphans. God's judgment on those who would afflict any woman or child was especially severe (Ex. 22:2-24).

Yet this does not mean that the impoverished condition of widows and orphans is legitimated because of God's care. God's identification with the oppressed helps them to value themselves as God values them and to recognize that their oppression is unjust. God does not want meek acceptance of oppression.

In *Liberation Preaching*, Justo and Catherine Gonzalez note, "God seems to choose those who have been made to feel like outcasts and then gives them a new sense of self-worth. God vindicates them in the eyes of their former oppressors."<sup>7</sup> This theme of the vindication of the powerless is a constant one in the Hebrew scriptures (1 Sam. 2:1-10). It is to be contrasted with the sinful arrogance of the powerful, who believe themselves secure in their own strength (Psalm 73).

It is essential to see that the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth continued this identification of the chosen of God with the poor. Jesus announced his ministry as one who proclaimed "release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-20.)

Jesus included women in his ministry and ministered to their distress, both spiritual and socioeconomic. The striking amount of biblical material that recounts Jesus' special regard for women, despite androcentric reaction, was the beginning point for the development of a feminist interpretation of the Bible.

Examples of Jesus' care for women are seen in the story of the widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4; 15:8-10), the forgiveness of the prostitute who has faith (Mark 14:3-9), the healing of the woman with the bloody flux (Luke 8:43-48), and the defense of Mary's right to discipleship (John 4:16-30) [57,58].

Raymond E. Brown has entertained the idea that the crucial role women play in discipleship and apostolic witness is evidence of female leadership in the Johannine community. Jesus' public ministry begins and ends with a story about women: Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene. Several times, stories of the discipleship of women and that of men are paired; the faithfulness of Nicodemus is paired with the insight of the Samaritan woman; the christological confession of Peter is paralleled by that of Martha. Women's roles in the Fourth Gospel placed them as intimate disciples, those whom Jesus loved (Martha and Mary).

In researching the evidence of the Fourth Gospel, one is still surprised to see to what extent in the Johannine community women and men were already on an equal level in the Good Shepherd. This seems to have been a community where in the things that really mattered in the following of Christ there was no difference between male and female — a Pauline dream (Gal. 3:28) that was not completely realized in the Pauline communities.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the text with which many abused women find the most identification is John 7:53-8:11. Jesus' defense of the woman who would have been stoned (abused) for adultery, omitted in many manuscripts, including the earliest ones, appears to be an authentic incident in the life of Jesus. Some interpreters have argued that this pericope was not

originally part of the Gospel of John. Yet the extraordinary position of women in this Gospel may be a reason for its later inclusion.

Whether or not the woman has already been tried, she is on the verge of execution, having been caught in the act of adultery. Adultery for Jewish women could consist merely in speaking to a male alone. Her crime is not specified beyond that text. But somehow she has transgressed patriarchal grounds.

Textual interpretation usually overlooks the woman's situation and stresses that the scribes and Pharisees wanted to put Jesus to the test and were looking for grounds on which to accuse him.<sup>9</sup> But women who have suffered physical violence hear that whatever human law or custom may legitimate violence against women, it cannot stand face to face with the revelation of God's affirmation of all humanity. Many abused women would echo the joy of the woman who exclaimed, "That's right! He (Jesus) broke the law for her!" ✓

### **Liberation of The Text: Taking Control**

Some biblical material that appears not to address women, or even appears hostile to them, can be reworked to bring out liberating themes for abused women. The opinion of women that prevailing androcentric interpretation of the Bible is wrong, coupled with the emphasis in a major portion of the biblical materials themselves on God's identification with the oppressed, creates critical interpretation. Consciousness-raising for these women has provided the essential catalyst: the insight that women are included in the category of the poor, the oppressed, and the outcast. Moving from that critical standpoint, women can begin to examine and reinterpret these texts, imaging new relationships between the texts and their experience.

An especially useful text is Luke 9:1-5, which ends, "And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave (there) shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." One of the crucial issues for abused women is the psychological and physical intimidation they experience, which prevents them from leaving. Shelters and safe houses can begin to help with the fear of destitution and further violence faced by a woman who contemplates leaving. But there are psychological factors as well, which include religious sanctions against a woman's "breaking up the home."

What kind of people are my children going to become, seeing us or hearing us live this way? Will my son abuse his wife or girlfriend as he's seen his father do? Will my daughter live in fear and dread of every man she meets? For *them*, if not for me, I've got to do something. But instead, I stay, and stay, and stay for what seems like an eternal hell. I can't see my way out. I'm fearful of losing family respect for my failed marriage, *afraid of censure about my religious confessions*, fearful of a terrible reputation with my own friends (the few who are left). Finally I become obsessed with a fear of losing my respect for myself, and for my sanity—what's left of it.<sup>10</sup>

Because abused women experience themselves as out of control of their lives, part of working with them involves attempts to take control. One of the major obstacles to women's hearing the permission to leave where they are not valued is that they do not identify themselves with the disciples.

Disciples are followers of Jesus who hear the Word and do it (Mark 8:34-35). By this definition, the Synoptic Gospels agree that women were among the most faithful of Jesus' disciples, remaining at the foot of the cross even when others had fled. Jesus appeared first to women and commissioned them to tell of his resurrection, the central fact of the "good news," to the other disciples (Matt. 28:20; Mark 16:7; Luke 24:8-9).

The Roman Catholic Church has emphasized the absence of women among the twelve as indicative of Jesus' preference for male leadership.<sup>11</sup> While the New Testament authors are not uniformly in agreement on the role of the twelve, the theological function of the twelve is to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. In this way they provide a bridge between the Israelite past and the hoped-for future in which all Jews and Gentiles would be united as the People of God. The twelve thus have a largely symbolic role, not an administrative one, as evidenced by the fact that they were not replaced by the church after their deaths.<sup>12</sup>

Much of the New Testament material leads one to believe that the circle around Jesus was in fact quite fluid and did include women. Another title for Jesus' followers throughout his ministry is apostle. Generally, the term "apostle" is thought to refer to the twelve, a point of view held by the framers of the Vatican Declaration. On the contrary: it is a much wider circle, according to some New Testament writers. Junia, considered a woman by John Chrysostom, is named by Paul as "outstanding among the apostles." (Rom. 16:7, NIV.) The "apostle" Paul, of course, was not a member of the twelve at all (Gal. 1:11 ff.).

It is therefore quite reasonable to decide that women were included in the most intimate circle around Jesus and that their inclusion was deliberate on his part. We begin to see how this text can be heard as addressing women. Power and authority are given to those who hear the Word of God and do it: the disciples. Women can claim this power and

authority to heal their situation. One woman, reading the text in this way, remarked, "I thought that you always had to turn the other cheek."

For too long we have neglected the healing and casting out of demons that occurs so frequently in biblical materials in favor of discussions focused solely around the miraculous. But for abused women, women who study the Bible with bloodied noses, bruised ribs, and broken limbs, healing has a concrete and immediate reference. Likewise, the demonic has a concrete reference for those who have experienced the cycle of violence that builds in the home of an abuser.<sup>13</sup>

Women are not named in scripture as among the twelve. But women can learn to imagine themselves in the text on the basis of other textual material that does affirm women (such as women's discipleship) and on the basis of their own experience, which shows that they have been the ones to hear the Word of God and do it. This type of imagining challenges traditional interpretation, which has ignored women who are actually in the text or whose presence is implied by the text, and moves interpretation to a new level of engagement with the contemporary life of the church.

### **The Liberation from The Text: Claiming Anger**

Recently I have been conducting Bible study groups composed primarily of Catholic women over forty. Biblical material has not formed the religious framework for their acceptance of battering. Rather, it has been the church and its teaching about the role of women, divorce, and contraception that has provided religious legitimization for battering. Biblical study with these women has proceeded in a different manner because they did not regard the text as the primary religious authority in their lives. Rather, they were willing to enter into a suspicion of the many texts we examined that seemed to legitimize violence against women. These women found that they could not always trust the text or its traditional interpretations and that some of the texts are "harmful to their health" [55, 130].

Ephesians 5:21-23 is a very difficult passage for abused women struggling to find self-respect and some control over their lives. A preliminary study of this passage modifies extreme misinterpretation that to be "subject" (v. 21) does not mean specifically subject to physical violence: "For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church." (v. 29.) Husbands are admonished to love their wives "as their own bodies." (v. 28.)

But physical violence is not the only form of abuse. Verbal intimidation, economic deprivation, and deliberate humiliation also characterize the violent relationship. One woman reported that her husband would deliberately keep her from arriving at family parties on time and then make her apologize to her relatives for being so late. This type of subjection appears compatible with the Ephesians passage, since only wives are admonished to "respect" their spouses.

Liberation from this text requires a recognition of its location within the biblical materials and of the function this particular emphasis in Ephesians played in the history of the church. In the pseudo-Pauline epistles, a shift away from the egalitarian ethos of the Jesus movement can be observed. Ephesians was written about the same time as Colossians, another epistle where the subjection of wives to husbands is emphasized. This is the first of the household duty codes, a series of exhortations to obedience in the households of the early Christian communities.

In Colossians 3:11, women are left out of the otherwise complete repetition of the baptismal formula of Galatians 3:28: "Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and all in all." "Neither male nor female" seems to belong to an earlier vision of human equality in Christ.

In Ephesians the household duty codes are limited to the relation of husbands and wives, combined with a theology of Christ and the church. This tends to reinforce the cultural notion of submission contained in the household duty codes with a theological legitimization of dominance and submission in the household of God. While the negative exhortation of Colossians ("Do not be harsh" to your wives) is softened ("Love" your wives), the inferior position of both wives and the church is cemented.

This is not the only pattern for divine-human relationships in the scripture. It is a pattern developed in response to social criticism of the newfound freedom of Christians, especially as this was reflected in the behavior of Christian wives and slaves. Other patterns exist, such as Galatians 3:28, and these can be drawn upon to critique patriarchal patterns such as Ephesians 5:21-23. The religious sanction in the household codes for the submission of women is a primary legitimization of wife abuse and must be challenged by women in order for them to gain some control over their own lives. A woman relates the traditional response of clergy:

Well, he spoke to both of us and he sat down for about an hour and he spoke about our financial situation and how having a child affected a marriage and things like that. Then he would bring in the vows of marriage — "to love, honor, and obey until death do us part." And I argued on the point of obeying because I feel, I felt at



that time, to obey, it's all right in certain principles but you cannot obey all your life. I mean, if I asked him to stop gambling he would not obey me, but I have to obey all his rules. The minister would not talk about that fact.<sup>14</sup>

On the contrary, we must begin to talk about obedience and the role it has played in the cultural accommodation of religion to social mores, particularly to patriarchy. We must find strength to reject this notion of obedience to male authority in claiming our anger at the suffering that women have experienced in obedience.

A final text to consider within this rubric of liberation from the text involves a more subtle perception of the patriarchal violence against women that is in the biblical material. Genesis 2:21-24 is such a text.

Although Phyllis Trible has dealt with this text creatively in suggesting ways it can be understood as a basis of equality between woman and man, feminist interpretation must also recognize that the history of control of women's bodies is at stake in this text and must become part of its interpretation.<sup>15</sup> In the development of patriarchy, a very important issue has been control of women's ability to procreate. The ability of women's bodies to create life has resulted in awe, fear, and the desire to control this power. While Freud may have discovered penis envy, womb envy has also played a role in human history.

This story is apparent in Genesis 2. A woman is born from a man in contrast to every other human birth. Perhaps, too, this interpretation of the first birth is also meant to symbolize control over women's abilities to make decisions about whether to bear a child. From an early period the church has attempted to curtail knowledge of contraception and abortion. Puritanical Protestants led a late-nineteenth-century campaign to pass laws making contraceptive knowledge a crime. The current "Right to Life" movement is ecumenical in that its adherents are both Catholics and Evangelical/Fundamentalist Protestants. These movements are attacks on female autonomy, which threatens patriarchal power at its core.

A Maryland woman who was severely abused over many years told me that when she complained after some attacks that she had sustained injuries, her husband would retort that "your bones are my bones — just like it says in the Bible." Less explicit reinforcement of patterns of domination and submission that legitimate violence against women can be found in interpretations of this text. Walter Brueggemann argues in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* that this text "suggests nothing of the superiority of the male as if often suggested." But Brueggemann correctly connects this text to marriage metaphors for divine-human relationship, such as "the Image of God and his (sic) bride Israel. He then rightly draws the important analogy between Genesis 2:18-23 and Ephesians 5:21-33:

The same imagery in Paul (Ephesians 5:21-23) is illuminated. The relation of Christ and his bride-church is grounded in a commonality of concern, loyalty, and responsibility which is pledged to endure through weakness and strength.<sup>17</sup>

But the metaphor of patriarchal marriage for divine-human relationship is not one of mutuality; it is an image of dominance and subordination in that cultural context. Likewise, tying marriage to the divine-human relationship clearly divinizes male superiority in that relationship.

Brueggemann's interpretation of Genesis 2:18-23 illustrates the limits of a biblical interpretation that does not take a nuanced approach to the materials. There is much affirmation of women within the biblical materials, but grounds for violence against women exist as well, along with much material in between. This material has shaped cultural attitudes toward women. But contemporary experience also shapes our interpretation of the text [91, 92].

Feminist biblical interpretation for women who live with male violence is a healing process that develops over time. It involves claiming self-esteem, taking control, and owning one's anger. Women's relationships to biblical materials need to undergo the same type of healing process. As Adrienne Rich has observed, "We have lived with violence far too long."<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

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10. Fleming, *Stopping*, pp. 73-74, quoted from *Introduction to Battered Women: One Testimony* (Southwest Community Mental Health Center, Columbus, Ohio). Italics added.
11. "Declaration on the Question of Admissions of Women to the Priesthood," in Leonard and Arlene Swidler, eds., *Women Priests: Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (Paulist Press, 1977).
12. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "The Twelve," in Swidler and Swidler, *Women Priests*, p. 138.
13. Lenore Walker has identified a three-stage cycle to the violence in homes of batterers: the "tension-building stage," the "acute battering incident," the "kindness and contrite, loving behavior" stage. Walker notes that women who kill their abusers do so in stage three. *The Battered Woman*, pp. 55-70.
14. Dobash and Dobash, *Violence Against Wives*, p. 205.
15. Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric . . .*, pp. 95-102.
16. Walter Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone, Genesis 2:23a," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32:532 (1969).
17. Ibid., p. 541.
18. Adrienne Rich, "Natural Resources," in her *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (W. W. Norton & Co., 1978), p. 185.

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## A Commentary on Religious Issues in Family Violence

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### The Importance of Religious Issues: Roadblocks or Resources?

The crisis of family violence affects people physically, psychologically, and spiritually. Each of these dimensions must be addressed, both for victims and for those in the family who abuse them. Approached from either a secular or religious perspective alone, certain needs and issues tend to be disregarded. This reflects a serious lack of understanding of the nature of family violence and its impact on people's lives. Treatment of families experiencing violence and abuse requires integrating the needs of the whole person. Thus, the importance of developing a shared understanding and cooperation between secular and religious helpers to deal with family violence cannot be emphasized too strongly.

Occasionally a social worker, psychotherapist, or other secular service provider will wonder, "Why bother with religious concerns at all?" The answer is a very practical one: religious issues or concerns which surface for people in the midst of crisis are primary issues. If not addressed in some way, at some point, they will inevitably become roadblocks to the client's efforts to resolve the crisis and move on with her/his life. In addition, a person's religious beliefs and community of faith (church or synagogue) can provide a primary support system for an individual and her/his family in the midst of an experience of family violence. ✓

For a pastor, priest, rabbi, lay counselor or other person approaching family violence from a religious perspective, there is little question about the relevance of religious concerns: these are primary for any religious person. Rather, they may doubt the importance of dealing with concerns for shelter, safety, intervention and treatment. "These people just need to get right with God and everything will be fine." This perspective overlooks the fact that these other issues are practical and important as well. Family violence is complex and potentially lethal; these seemingly mundane concerns represent immediate and critical needs.

When confronted with a personal experience of family violence, like any other crisis whether chronic or sudden, most people also experience a crisis of meaning in their lives. Very basic life questions arise and are usually expressed in religious and/or philosophical terms. Questions like, "Why is this happening to me and my family?" or "Why did God let this happen?" or "What meaning does this have for my life?" are all indications of people's efforts to understand, to make sense out of experiences of suffering and to place the experiences in a context of meaning for their lives. These questions are to be seen as a healthy sign because they represent an effort to comprehend and contextualize the experience of family violence and thereby regain some control over their lives in the midst of crisis.

Thus for many individuals and families in crisis, the questions of meaning will be expressed in religious terms, and more specifically, in terms of the Jewish or Christian traditions, since the vast majority of people in the U.S. today grew up with some association with these traditions. Many continue as adults to be involved with a church or synagogue. In addition, Jewish and Christian values overlap with cultural values of the majority American culture, so most Americans carry a set of cultural values, consciously or unconsciously, which are primarily Jewish or Christian in nature.<sup>1</sup>

Religious concerns can become roadblocks or resources for those dealing with experiences of family violence because these concerns are central to many people's lives. The outcome depends on how they are handled. ✓

The misinterpretation and misuse of the Jewish and Christian traditions have often had a detrimental effect on families, particularly those dealing with family violence. Misinterpretation of the traditions can contribute substantially to the guilt, self-blame, and suffering which victims experience and to the rationalizations often used by those who



abuse, "But the Bible says . . ." is frequently used to explain, excuse, or justify abuse between family members. This need not be the case. Re-examining and analyzing those Biblical references which have been misused can lead to reclaiming the traditions in a way which supports victims and those who abuse while clearly confronting and challenging abuse in the family.

A careful study of both Jewish and Christian scriptures makes it very clear that it is not possible to use scripture to justify abuse of persons in the family. However, it is also clear that it is possible to misuse scripture and other traditional religious literature for this purpose. This is a frequent practice (see below). Attempting to teach that there are very simple answers to the very complex issues which people face in their lives is another potential roadblock within contemporary teachings of some Jewish or Christian groups. Thus, religious groups have often not adequately prepared people for the traumas which they will face at some point in their lives: illness, death, abuse, divorce, and so forth.

"Keep the commandments and everything will be fine."

"Keep praying."

"Just accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and you will be healthy, prosperous, popular, and happy."

"Go to services each week."

"Pray harder."

While these teachings may be fundamental teachings of religious faith, alone they are inadequate to deal with the complexity of most experiences of human suffering like family violence. When offered as simple and complete answers to life's questions, they create in the hearer an illusion of simplicity which leaves the hearer vulnerable to becoming overwhelmed by an experience of suffering. In addition, the teachings set up a dynamic which blames the victims for their suffering.

"If you are a good Christian or a good Jew, God will treat you kindly, or take care of you, or make you prosper as a reward for your goodness."

"If you suffer, it is a sign that you must not be a good Christian or a good Jew and God is displeased with you."

If one accepts this simple formula (which makes a theological assumption that God's love is conditional), then when one experiences any form of suffering, one feels punished or abandoned by God. The simple answer alone cannot hold up in the face of personal or familial suffering. When people attempt to utilize the simple answer and it is insufficient, they feel that their faith has failed them or that God has abandoned them. In fact, it may be the teachings or actions of their particular congregation or denomination which have been inadequate to their needs. Thus they may be feeling abandoned.

The religious teachings of the Jewish and Christian traditions are adequate to address the experiences of contemporary persons when the traditions acknowledge the complexity, the paradox, and sometimes the incomprehensible nature of those experiences. The most important resource which the church or synagogue can provide is to be available to support those who are suffering, to be a sign of God's presence, and to be willing to struggle with the questions which the experiences may raise. Offering sweet words of advice to "solve" life's problems reduces the experience of the one who suffers to a mere slogan and denies the depth of the pain and the potential for healing and new life.

### **Cooperative Roles for Secular Counselor and Minister/Rabbi**

Both the secular counselor and the minister or rabbi have important roles to play in response to family violence. Families in which there is abuse need the support and expertise of both in times of crisis. Sometimes the efforts of the two will come into conflict, as illustrated by the following situation:

We received a call at the Center from a local shelter for abused women. The shelter worker indicated that she had a badly beaten woman there whose minister had told her to go back home to her husband. The worker asked us to call the minister and "straighten him out." Ten minutes later we received a call from the minister. He said that the shelter had one of his parishioners there and the shelter worker had told her to get a divorce. He asked us to call the shelter and "straighten them out."

In the above case, both the shelter worker and the minister had the best interests of the victim in mind. Yet they were clearly at odds with each other because they did not understand the other's concerns which related to the needs of the victim. The shelter worker did not understand the minister's concern for maintaining the family and the minister did not understand that the woman's life was in danger. We arranged for the minister and the shelter worker to talk directly with each other, sharing their concerns in order to seek a solution in the best interest of the victim. This was accomplished successfully.

The need for cooperation and communication between counselors and ministers or rabbis is clear so that the needs of parishioners/congregants/clients are best served and the resources of both religious and secular helpers are utilized effectively.

### **Role of The Secular Counselor**

In the secular setting, a social worker or mental health provider may encounter a victim or abuser who raises religious questions or concerns. When this occurs, the following guidelines are helpful:

1. Pay attention to religious questions/comments/references.
2. Affirm these concerns as appropriate and check out their importance for the client.
3. Having identified and affirmed this area of concern, if you are uncomfortable with it yourself or feel unqualified to pursue it, refer to a pastor/priest/rabbi who is trained to help and whom you know and trust.
4. If you are comfortable and would like to pursue the concern, do so, emphasizing the ways in which the client's religious tradition can be a resource to her/him and can in no way be used to justify or allow abuse or violence to continue in the family. (See below.)

### **Scriptural and Theological Issues**

Suffering. The experience of physical or psychological pain or deprivation can generally be referred to as "suffering." When a person experiences suffering, often the first question is, "Why am I suffering?" and "Why me?" These are classical theological questions to which there are no totally satisfactory answers.

Sometimes a person will answer these questions in terms of very specific cause-and-effect relationships:

I am being abused by my husband as punishment from God for the fact that 20 years ago, when I was 17 years old, I had sexual relations with a guy I wasn't married to.

In this case, the victim of abuse sees her suffering as just punishment for an event which happened long ago and for which she has since felt guilty. This explanation has an almost superstitious quality. It reflects an effort on the part of the woman to make sense out of her experience of abuse by her husband. Her explanation takes the "effect" (the abuse), looks for a probably "cause" (her teenage "sin"), and directly connects the two. This conclusion is based on a set of theological assumptions which support her view: God is a stern judge who seeks retribution for her sins and God causes suffering to be inflicted on her as punishment.

Unfortunately, the woman's explanation neither focuses on the real nature of her suffering (i.e., the abuse by her husband), nor does it place responsibility for her suffering where it lies: on her abusive husband.

Sometimes, people try to explain suffering by saying that it is "God's will" or "part of God's plan for my life" or "God's way of teaching me a lesson." These explanations assume God to be stern, harsh, even cruel and arbitrary. This image of God runs counter to a Biblical image of a kind, merciful and loving God. The God of this Biblical teaching does not single out anyone to suffer for the sake of suffering, because suffering is not pleasing to God.

A distinction between voluntary and involuntary suffering is useful at this point. Someone may choose to suffer abuse or indignity in order to accomplish a greater good. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. suffered greatly in order to change what he believed to be unjust, racist laws. Although the abuse he experienced was not justifiable, he chose voluntary suffering as a means to an end.

Involuntary suffering which occurs when a person is beaten, raped, or abused, especially in a family relationship, also cannot be justified, but is never chosen. It may, on occasion, be endured by a victim for a number of reasons, including a belief that such endurance will eventually "change" the person who is being abusive. However, this belief is unrealistic and generally only reinforces the abuse.

Christian tradition teaches that suffering happens to people because there is evil and sinfulness in the world. Unfortunately, when someone behaves in a hurtful way, someone else usually bears the brunt of that act and suffers as a result. Striving to live a righteous life does not guarantee that one will be protected from the sinfulness of another. A

person may find that she/he suffers from having made a poor decision (e.g., by marrying a spouse who is abusive). But this in no way means that the person either wants to suffer or deserves abuse from the spouse.

In Christian teaching, at no point does God promise that we will not suffer in this life. In scripture, God does promise to be present to us when we suffer. This is especially evident in the Psalms which give vivid testimony to people's experience of God's faithfulness in the midst of suffering (Psalms 22 and 55).

One's fear of abandonment by God is often strong when experiencing suffering and abuse. This fear is usually experienced by victims of abuse who often feel they have been abandoned by almost everyone: friends, other family members, clergy, doctors, police, lawyers, counselors. Perhaps none of these believed the family members or were able to help. It is therefore very easy for victims to conclude that God has also abandoned them. For Christians, the promise to victims from God is that even though all others abandon them, God will be faithful. This is the message found in Romans:

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39, RSV)

Often this reassurance is very helpful to victims of violence or to those who abuse them.

Sometimes, people who regard suffering as God's will for them believe that God is teaching them a lesson and/or that hardship builds character. Experiences of suffering can, in fact, be occasions for growth. People who suffer may realize in retrospect that they learned a great deal from the experience and grew more mature as a result. This often is the case, but only if the person who is suffering also receives support and affirmation throughout the experience. With the support of family, friends, and helpers, people who are confronted with violence in their family can end the abuse, possibly leave the situation, make major changes in their lives, and grow as mature adults. They will probably learn some difficult lessons: increased self-reliance; how to express anger; that they may survive better outside than inside abusive relationships; that they can be a whole person without being married; that they can exercise control over their actions with others; that family relationships need not be abusive and violent.

However, this awareness of suffering as the occasion for growth must come from those who are suffering and at a time when they are well on their way to renewal. It is hardly appropriate when someone is feeling great pain to point out that things really are not so bad and that someday she/he will be glad that all of this happened. These words of "comfort and reassurance" are usually for the benefit of the minister/rabbi or counselor, not the parishioner/congregant or client. At a later time, it may be useful to point out the new growth which has taken place, and very simply to affirm the reality that this person has survived an extremely difficult situation. Suffering may present an occasion for growth; whether this potential is actualized depends on how the experience of suffering is managed.

### **Nature of The Marriage Relationship: A Jewish Perspective**

The Jewish marriage ceremony is known as "Kiddushin" or sanctification. Through it a couple's relationship is sanctified or set apart before God. This sanctification reminds Jews to strive to express their holiness through marriage and the home in a covenantal relationship which is based on mutual love and respect.

Judaism views marriage as necessary for fulfillment. Marriage is part of God's plan. The first time God speaks to Adam, God says that it is not fitting that Adam should be alone. "Shalom Bayit," peace in the home, is a major family value in Judaism. "Shalom," which is simply translated as "peace," also signifies wholeness, completeness, fulfillment. Peace in the home, domestic harmony, encompasses the good and welfare of all the home's inhabitants.

The rabbis consider domestic tranquility as one of the most important ideals because it is the essential forerunner to peace on earth. "Peace will remain a distant vision until we do the work of peace ourselves. If peace is to be brought into the world we must bring it first to our families and communities."<sup>2</sup>

The concept of Shalom Bayit should not be misinterpreted as encouraging the preservation of an abusive marriage. When domestic harmony is impossible because of physical abuse, the only way for peace may be dissolution of marriage. Although marriage is viewed as permanent, divorce has always been an option according to Jewish tradition.

In Judaism conjugal rights are obligatory upon the husband who must be available for his wife.

A wife may restrict her husband in his business journey to nearby places only, so that he would not otherwise deprive her of her conjugal rights. Hence he may not set out without her permission.<sup>3</sup>

While the husband is responsible for his wife's sexual fulfillment, the wife, in return, is expected to have sexual

relations with her husband. Maimonides<sup>4</sup> teaches us about the relationship between husband and wife in a Jewish marriage. He asserts that if the wife refuses sexual relations with her husband . . .

she should be questioned as to the reason . . . . If she says, "I have come to loathe him, and I cannot willingly submit to his intercourse," he must be compelled to divorce her immediately for she is not like a captive woman who must submit to a man that is hateful to her.<sup>5</sup>

This suggests that no wife is expected to submit to sexual activity with a husband she fears or hates. The arena of sexual sharing for Jewish couples is one of mutual responsibility and choice.

### **Nature of The Marriage Relationship: A Christian Perspective.**

Christian teaching about the model of the marriage relationship has traditionally focused heavily on Paul's letters to the Ephesians, Corinthians, and Colossians. Misinterpretations of or misplaced emphasis on these texts create substantial problems for many married couples. Most commonly, directives on marriage based on scripture are given to women and not to men, and state that wives must "submit" to their husbands. This often is interpreted to mean that the husband/father is the absolute head of the household and that the wife and children must obey him without question. Unfortunately, this idea has also been interpreted to mean that wives and children must submit to abuse from husbands and fathers. This rationalization is used by those who abuse, as well as by counselors, clergy, and the victims of the abuse themselves.

A closer look at the actual scriptural references reveals a different picture. For example, Ephesians 5.21:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. (RSV, emphasis added.)

This is the first and most important verse in the Ephesians passage on marriage and also the one most often overlooked. It clearly indicates that all Christians — husbands and wives — are to be mutually subject to one another. The word which is translated "be subject to" can more appropriately be translated "defer" or "accommodate" to.

Wives accommodate to your husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5.22.)

This teaching implies sensitivity, flexibility, and responsiveness to the husband. In no way can this verse be taken to mean that a wife must submit to abuse from her husband.

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5.23-24, RSV)

The model suggested here of husband-wife relationship is based on the Christ-church relationship. It is clear from Jesus' teaching and ministry that his relationship to his followers was not one of dominance or authoritarianism, but rather one of servant-hood. For example, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples in an act of serving. He taught them that those who would be first must in fact be last. Therefore, a good husband will not dominate or control his wife but will serve and care for her, according to Ephesians.

Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. (Ephesians 5.28-29, RSV)

This instruction to husbands is very clear and concrete. A husband is to nourish and cherish his own body and that of his wife. Physical battering which occurs between spouses is probably the most blatant violation of this teaching and a clear reflection of the self-hatred in the one who is abusive.

It is interesting that the passages quoted above from Ephesians (5.21-29) which are commonly used as instruction for marriage are instruction primarily for husbands; nine of the verses are directed toward husbands' responsibilities in marriage; only three of the verses refer to wives' responsibilities and one refers to both. Yet, contemporary interpretation often focuses only on the wives and often misuses those passages to justify the abuse of the wives by their husbands. While spouse abuse may be a common pattern in marriage, it certainly cannot be legitimated by scripture.

In terms of sexuality in marriage, again this passage from Ephesians (see also Colossians 3.18-21) has been used to establish a relationship in which the husband has conjugal rights and the wife has conjugal duties. In fact, other scriptural passages are explicit on this issue:

The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to the husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. (I Corinthians 7.3-4, RSV)

The rights and expectations between husband and wife in regard to sexual matters are explicitly equal and parallel, and include the right to refuse sexual contact. The expectation of equality of conjugal rights and sexual access and the need for mutual consideration in sexual activity is clear. The suggestion that both wife and husband "rule over" the other's body and not their own refers to the need for joint, mutual decisions about sexual activity rather than arbitrary, independent decisions. A husband does not have the right to act out of his own sexual needs without agreement from the wife; likewise, the wife also. This particular passage directly challenges the incidents of sexual abuse (rape) in marriage frequently reported by physically abused wives.

### **The Marriage Covenant and Divorce**

A strong belief in the permanency of the marriage vows may prevent an abused spouse from considering separation or divorce as options for dealing with family violence. For the Christian, the promise of faithfulness "for better or for worse... 'til death do us part" is commonly taken to mean "stay in the marriage no matter what," even though death of one or more family members is a real possibility in abusive families. Jews view marriage as permanent, but "'til death do us part" is not part of the ceremony. The Jewish attitude embodies a very delicate balance. Marriage is taken very seriously. It is a primary religious obligation and should not be entered into or discarded flippantly. Nevertheless, since the days of Deuteronomy, Jewish tradition has recognized the unfortunate reality that some couples are hopelessly incompatible and divorce may be a necessary option.

For some Christians, their denomination's strong doctrinal position against divorce may inhibit them from exercising this means of dealing with family violence. For others, a position against divorce is a personal belief often supported by their family and church. In either case, there is a common assumption that any marriage is better than no marriage at all and, therefore, should be maintained at any cost. This assumption arises from a superficial view of marriage which is concerned only with appearances and not with substance. In other words, as long as marriage and family relationships maintain a facade of normalcy, there is a refusal by church and community to look any closer for fear of seeing abuse or violence in the home.

The covenant of Christian marriage is a life-long, sacred commitment made between two persons and witnessed by other persons and by God. Jews also regard marriage as sacred and intend that it be permanent. A covenant between marriage partners has the following elements:

1. It is made in full knowledge of the relationship.
2. It involves a mutual giving of self to the other.
3. It is assumed to be lasting.
4. It values mutuality, respect, and equality between persons.

A marriage covenant can be violated by one or both partners. It is common thinking in both Jewish and Christian traditions that adultery violates the marriage covenant and results in brokenness in the relationship. Likewise, violence or abuse in a marriage violates the covenant and fractures a relationship. In both cases the trust which was assumed between partners is shattered. Neither partner should be expected to remain in an abusive situation. Often, one marriage partner feels a heavy obligation to remain in the relationship and do everything possible to make it work. This is most often true for women. A covenant relationship only works if both partners are able and willing to work on it. In both traditions, it is clear that God does not expect anyone to stay in a situation that is abusive (i.e., to become a doormat). In the Christian tradition, just as Jesus did not expect his disciples to remain in a village that did not respect and care for them (Luke 9.1-6), neither does he expect persons to remain in a family relationship where they are abused and violated. In Jewish literature, the expectation is also clear:

... if a man was found to be a wifebeater, he had to pay damages and provide her with separate maintenance. Failing that, the wife had valid grounds for compelling a divorce.<sup>6</sup>



If there is a genuine effort to change on the part of the one who is abusive, it is possible to renew the marriage covenant, including in it a clear commitment to non-violence in the relationship. With treatment for the family members, it may be possible to salvage the relationship. If the one who is being abusive is not willing or able to change in the relationship, then the question of divorce arises. At this point in the marriage, divorce is really a matter of public statement: "Shall we make public the fact that our relationship has been broken by abuse?" The other option, of course, is to continue to pretend that the marriage is intact. (A woman reported that she divorced only a month ago but that her marriage ended ten years ago when the abuse began.)

In violent homes, divorce is not breaking up families. Violence and abuse are breaking up families. Divorce is often the painful, public acknowledgement of an already accomplished fact. While divorce is never easy, it is, in the case of family violence, the lesser evil. In many cases divorce may be a necessary intervention to generate healing and new life from a devastating and deadly situation.

### Parents and Children

"Honor your Father and your Mother" is one of the Ten Commandments taught to all Jewish and Christian children. Unfortunately, some parents misuse this teaching in order to demand unquestioning obedience from their children. In a hierarchical, authoritarian household, a father may misuse his parental authority to coerce a child into abusive sexual activity (incest). Parents may use this commandment to rationalize their physical abuse of a child in retaliation for a child's lack of obedience.

For Christians, the meaning of the third commandment is made very clear in Ephesians:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for his is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise) "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6.1-4, RSV, emphasis added.)

Children's obedience to their parents is to be "in the Lord"; it is not to be blind and unquestioning. In addition to instructions to children, instructions are also given to parents to guide and instruct their children in Christian values, i.e., love, mercy, compassion, and justice. Any discipline of a child must be for the child's best interest. The caution to the father not to provoke the child to anger is most appropriate. If there is anything which will certainly provoke a child to anger, it is physical or sexual abuse by a parent.

Jewish tradition deals with the same concern, making a distinction between children based on maturity.

One is forbidden to beat his grownup son, the word "grownup" in this regard refers not to age but to his maturity. If there is reason to believe that the son will rebel, and express that resentment by word or deed, even though he has not yet reached the age of Bar Mitzvah (13), it is forbidden to beat him. Instead he should reason with him. Anyone who beats his grownup children is to be excommunicated, because he transgresses the Divine Command (Lev. 19:14) 'Thou shalt not put a stumbling block before the blind' (for they are apt to bring sin and punishment upon their children.)"

Even though Jewish law gives great authority to the father in relationship to the children, the requirement for restraint is clearly indicated. Again, the priority is on the welfare of the child.

The other scriptural injunction which is commonly used to justify abusive discipline of children is the Proverb, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." This proverb is commonly interpreted to mean that if a parent does not use corporal punishment on a child, the child will become a spoiled brat. This is a good example of a misinterpretation based on a contemporary understanding. In fact, the image referred to in this Proverb is probably that of shepherd and the rod is the shepherd's staff (see Psalm 23.4: "thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me"). A shepherd uses his staff to guide the sheep where they should go. The staff is not used as a cudgel.

With this image of the shepherd guiding the sheep in mind, it is certainly clear that children need guidance and discipline from parents and other caring adults to grow to maturity. Children do not need to be physically beaten to receive guidance or discipline. Beating children as discipline teaches them very early that it is all right to hit those you love for their own good. This kind of lesson fosters early training for persons who grow up and subsequently physically abuse their spouses and children.

## Confession and Forgiveness

The need to admit wrongdoing experienced by an abusive family member is a healthy sign that he/she is no longer denying the problem but is ready and willing to face it. The offender may seek out a minister or rabbi for the purpose of confessing.

Sometimes, however, an abusive father confesses, asks forgiveness, and promises never to sexually approach his daughter again, or a mother swears never to hit her child in anger again. The minister/rabbi is then put in a position of assuring forgiveness and evaluating the strength of the person's promise not to abuse again. While the abuser may be genuinely contrite, he/she is seldom able to end the abuse without assistance and treatment.

The minister/rabbi needs to assure the person of God's forgiveness and must confront the person with the fact that he/she needs additional help in order to stop the abuse. For some people, a strong word from a minister/rabbi at this point is an effective deterrent: "The abuse must stop now." Sometimes this strong directive can provide an external framework for beginning to change the abusive behavior.

For the Jew the Hebrew term "teshuvah" is the word for repentance. "Teshuvah" literally means "return," clearly denoting a return to God after sin. In Judaism there is a distinction between sins against God and sins against people. For the former only regret or confession is necessary. For sins against people, "teshuvah" requires three steps: first, admission of wrongdoing; second, asking for forgiveness of the person wronged (here abused); third, reconciliation which can be accomplished only by a change in behavior.

The issue of forgiveness also arises for victims of abuse. A friend or family member may pressure the victim: "You should forgive him. He said he was sorry." Or it may arise internally: "I wish I could forgive him . . ." In either case, the victim feels guilty for not being able to forgive the abuser. In these cases, often forgiveness is interpreted to mean to forget or pretend the abuse never happened. Neither is possible. The abuse will never be forgotten — it becomes a part of the victim's history. Forgiveness is a matter of the victim's being able to say that she/he will no longer allow the experience to dominate her/his life — and will let go of it and move on. This is usually possible if there is some sense of justice in the situation, officially (through the legal system) or unofficially. Forgiveness by the victim is possible when there is repentance on the part of the abuser, and real repentance means a change in the abuser's behavior.

Another issue is timing. Too often the minister/rabbi or counselor's need for the victim to finish and resolve the abusive experience leads him/her to push a victim to forgive the abuser. Forgiveness in this case is seen as a means to hurry the victim's healing process along. Victims will move to forgive at their own pace and cannot be pushed by others' expectations of them. It may take years before they are ready to forgive; their timing needs to be respected. They will forgive when they are ready. Then the forgiveness becomes the final stage of letting go and enables them to move on with their lives.

## Conclusion

This commentary addresses some of the common religious concerns raised by people dealing with family violence. It is an attempt to help the reader begin to see ways of converting potential roadblocks into valuable resources for those dealing with violence in their families.

Personal faith for a religious person can provide much needed strength and courage to face a very painful situation and make changes in it. Churches and synagogues can provide a much needed network of community support for victims, abusers, and their children.

It is clearly necessary for those involved in Jewish and Christian congregations and institutions to begin to address these concerns directly. In ignorance and oversight, we do much harm. In awareness and action, we can contribute a critical element to the efforts to respond to family violence in our communities.

## NOTES

1. The discussion of religious issues included here reflects a Jewish and Christian perspective due to the background and experience of the authors and contributors. Although there are other religious traditions also present in the pluralistic American culture, the focus of this discussion is limited by the authors' perspectives and experiences.
2. *Gates of Repentance* (High Holy Days Prayer Book), Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1978, p. 67.
3. *Yad, Ishut*, XIV-2, Yale Judaica Series, p. 87.

4. Maimonides was a Jewish philosopher (1135-1204) whose *Mishneh Torah* became a standard work of Jewish law and a major source for all subsequent codification of Jewish law.

5. Yad, Ishut XIV 8, p. 89.

6. Maurice Lamm, *Jewish Way in Love and Marriage*, p. 157.

7. *Kizzur Shulhan Arukh*.



## Family Violence: When People Hurt The Ones They Love

Dan Mintie

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**“What is family violence after all? It is a deep violation of one person by another; that is, it’s a sin. It is no more a private affair between two individuals than any other sin.”**

It is a warm spring afternoon in the Broadway district of Seattle. The cherry blossoms are at the pinnacle of their brief splendor, the old sun comes booming back, and a yellow finch goes quickly through the blue air. The boulevard is a festive jam of buses, cars, shoppers, bicycles, and golden retrievers. And just outside the double doors of the main shopping mall, a well-dressed man in his mid-20s is holding a woman at arm’s length with his left hand and methodically smashing her in the face with his right.

The woman is bleeding out the side of her mouth, and her left eye is beginning to darken. She is pleading with him, by name, to stop. He doesn’t answer. His face is calm, detached. A crowd is beginning to form; a barely perceptible shudder runs through it each time the young man’s fist lands.

It is the Broadway district of Seattle, but it certainly could be a typical neighborhood in any American city or town. Research shows 60 percent of all couples will experience violence at some time in their relationship. One in seven women now report marital rape. Family violence, moreover, is no respecter of any discernible demographic lines. It is as likely to be found in project housing as in a two-story suburban rambler, in long-term marriages as frequently as brand new ones. The only factor researchers can isolate which puts a family at substantially higher risk for violence is the presence of a rigid, authoritarian structure of power and authority.

“Where has the church been on the issue of domestic violence?” asks Kathleen, a woman who has spent the last 22 years helping with justice issues in the western states. “Nowhere. As with other ‘quality of life’ issues, it has generally been content to have married couples live beneath the same roof. The quality of that relationship has simply not been an issue.”

Kathleen’s assessment is shared by many professionals. They say far too many people don’t know how to deal with an abused woman and would just as soon send her home than try to find her help.

Why do so many women remain in a violent household? Dr. Murray Straus, director of the Family Research Lab at the University of New Hampshire and author of three books on family violence says, “Mothers, sisters, and priests. All three typically advise the women to stick it out — in part with good reason: ‘We don’t want to breaking up families.’ But this advice is rarely coupled with effective help in changing the marriage itself.”

Sharon, a worker at a women’s shelter in a major metropolitan city, says some clergy will bring in an abused woman and then tell the shelter workers, “She doesn’t need much help, as you can see, because she’s crying. She’s already sorry for what she’s done.” “We’re grateful those people at least bring the woman in,” says Sharon, “but it’s not exactly the type of support from the parish community that we’d like. The few good experiences we’ve had were where the pastor brought the woman to the shelter and then did lots of follow-up — calling the woman to see how she was doing, offering financial help, and letting the woman know she could call the parish at any time for help. That’s the kind of support we want to see more of.”

### A “Hitting License”

What causes the family, presently the single most supportive and nurturing social environment, to be at such risk of becoming the single most deadly? According to Dr. Straus, a number of forces are at work that can turn the marriage license into a kind of “hitting license.” One of these is the fact that law enforcement agencies can refuse to take the problem seriously. “In English common law,” he says, “husbands had the right to physically chastise an errant wife. While this law is no longer on the books, it is still in de facto existence.”

Another problem arises from what Straus calls the “universal method” of disciplining children in America today: physical punishment. (In a recent poll 97 percent of parents of 3-year-olds spanked their children. Another study revealed that more than half of all parents are still hitting their children when they leave home at age 18.) While

spanking a child who insists on playing with electrical cords, for example, may be an act of love and concern, says Straus, it also "establishes a link between love and violence that stays with most people through life. It teaches the child that those who love you are also those who hit you." And so there is a much higher incidence of spouse abuse among those who received physical punishment as children than among those who did not.

Other factors that may make a person more likely to be abusive include an inability to deal with stress and a history of either being abused or witnessing abuse as a child. Taken together these forces paint family violence not as some inexplicable aberration on the part of isolated individuals but as a natural consequence of society's assumptions about power, relationships, and the "place" of men and women. This pushes the question of prevention back to the early years of childhood development. Says a staff member at one shelter, "We are coming to understand that violence is a learned response, that little boys learn violence as a response to anger. The problem is not going to disappear until we begin to teach other responses."

### **Horror Stories**

When Marie first set eyes on Ivan, all her ideas about what a human being could and should be fell suddenly into a single place. A huge man (with hands so large that, years later, police would be unable to cuff them) possessed of a brilliance and striking good looks, he also embodied practically every quality his seven children would later dream of wanting in a father. Except for two, that is: he lacked temperance with alcohol and the ability to relate to Marie without quickly resorting to physical force.

Their courtship and first years of marriage were marred only by a single incident. On their way home from a movie to their Manhattan apartment, Marie, who had been playfully flinging herself into Ivan's arms the way she had seen the ballerina do in the film, suddenly found herself smacked to the ground with the beginnings of a bruise that would eventually cover most of her left thigh. "It was dark," she told herself. "He had already told me he didn't want to play; it must have been an accident." Later his horror at the bruise and refusal to take any responsibility for her fall sealed her belief that the whole incident had been a terrible accident.

In the years that followed, however, it became terribly clear that there was nothing at all accidental about the program of terror Ivan waged against his family. An impeccable gentleman when sober, he spent more and more time drunk and became increasingly vicious in his attacks against Marie. When they locked him out, he simply kicked in the door and roared through the house, breaking furniture and hunting down his wife from room to room. At one point Marie lay in bed for a week with a concussion, without money for a doctor, listening to her husband explain that he wouldn't kill her until the children were raised; he needed her until then.

Why didn't she leave? Marie shrugs. "Where was I to go? Was I supposed to leave my kids with him? If I did move out, I couldn't support them; they would all have ended up in foster homes. Anyway, I didn't have any money even to leave with. I didn't have a red cent to even take a bus. He controlled the purse strings. I had so little money for food that often I didn't eat so that the kids could. Sometimes I'd buy something I knew they didn't like so that there would be some left for me."

Marie's years of terror are not untypical of the circumstances in which millions of American women presently live. And while the particular facts of their stories may differ, some general trends appear. Violence often appears at first to be accidental and then gradually becomes increasingly deliberate. Says Marie Fortune, director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle, family violence often begins with the destruction of the victim's property and then goes on to psychological and then physical abuse. "This is not always the case," says Fortune, "but I would certainly consider it a danger sign if someone begins responding to stress by throwing things against the wall. This is reason to be concerned." Fortune's other red flags: intense jealousy by the male partner, a tendency toward controlling behavior, and an absolute control over decision making. To these Dr. Strauss adds "certain glances, body postures, or gestures that say, 'Stay in line or you'll get slapped down.' He may start saying, 'Don't mess with me!' We know what that means."

Straus, Fortune, and other family-violence experts agree it is crucial at these first signs of potential trouble that a woman blow the whistle on such behavior, insist that her partner seek help, and make absolutely clear that at the first touch the entire relationship will be subject to radical reevaluation. Only such assertive responses as these are likely to produce change in a partner's behavior and protect the rights of all family members.

### **Take 'Em to Church**

"I'm an Irish ghetto Catholic," says Marie. "I was raised believing that you take all your problems to church." And so, when her marriage to Ivan began taking on nightmarish overtones, Marie naturally turned to her parish community for help.

The first encounter was with the Legion of Mary. Marie had frequently attended Legion meetings in happier days and had made charitable visits with the group to parish members in need. But as things got worse at home, Marie stopped attending. Several Legionnaires finally dropped by to ask why and to see if there was anything they could do to help. Perhaps it was her black eye, says Marie, "Or perhaps they were just shocked at the obvious poverty around the place. Anyway, they never came back."

Months later she stood at the rectory door at 2 a.m. in the bitter cold with five children after Ivan had kicked in the back door and stormed through the house with a 12-inch fish knife. "The poor man," says Marie. "He was an elderly priest and was so upset that he didn't know what to do. He didn't say anything — just stood there in the doorway dumbfounded, with his mouth hanging open. Finally we left."

Marie's final contact with her parish came when she had seven children, no money (having divorced Ivan), and was receiving nightly phone calls from her ex-husband during which he would describe in explicit detail how he was going to torture her to death the way they tortured German soldiers on the Russian front in 1944. She had gone to a psychiatrist who told her she was depressed and had given her tranquilizers — which heightened her depression.

Finally, suicidal, she went to church and walked from statue to statue asking the saints for assistance. She noticed a doorway and climbed the stairs to the belfry where, exhausted, safe at last, she fell on the floor and cried herself to sleep. She was awakened a few hours later by a black leather shoe nudging her in the ribcage. She followed the pantleg up and found herself staring into the face of a city policeman. Finding her asleep in the bell tower, someone had called the police and asked them to escort her to the precinct downtown.

"Shelters such as ours will often get calls like Marie's," says Sharon. "We get referrals from the human services departments of police departments, from emergency rooms, and from parishes. The only problem is that so often we are already filled up, and we get frustrated when some priests still leave the abused women after we have told him we're full. We ask him why she can't stay in an empty room at the rectory, and he'll reply, 'We can't have a lady in the rectory.' And any convent we've ever asked to help refused because they were afraid of the women."

While what Sharon says may be true of some parishes, pastors of all denominations are beginning to hold themselves and their congregations accountable for helping families in need. "What is family violence after all?" asks Jan Anderson, a Methodist pastor who recently completed training in counseling abused wives. "It is a deep violation of one person by another; that is, it's a sin." As such, says Anderson, "It is no more a private affair between two individuals than any other sin. The entire community is affected. This makes the parish an appropriate forum in which to address the issue. For one thing, many women will approach their pastor before anyone else. Unfortunately few pastors are adequately trained to give women the kind of support and direction they need."

### **Who Do You Call?**

Sharon echoes Anderson's recognition that pastors are usually the first ones abused women will contact. "When women arrive at our shelter, invariably the first person they call is their pastor. Although it's always difficult to hear how one pastor or another will shut himself off from the abused women, it's always encouraging when the pastor tries to help the woman, be it through psychological counseling, finding a job, or just lending an ear. Ideally, though, we'd like to see parishes reaching out to find the abused women in the parish before they get to the point that they have to come to a shelter to get help."

In her book, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (The Pilgrim Press, 1983) Fortune, an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, recounts an incident in which at the end of a four-week seminar on domestic violence, a priest reported with some distress a "sudden outbreak" of violence in his small parish.

The seminar coordinator explored this further with the group and discovered that the pastor, on the first Sunday after the first seminar session, had announced from the pulpit that he was taking a seminar on sexual abuse and domestic violence which he was finding very helpful. In the weeks following the announcement, parishioners came forward for the first time with their concerns . . . . By making that announcement from the pulpit the pastor in effect hung up a sign saying, "I am learning about these problems and know that some of you are facing them and am available to help." It should have come as no surprise that people sought his assistance.

"Parishes need to find out who the abused women are in their parish," says Sharon, "and that is not done by just assuming that women who are having problems will come forward with them. It is done by inviting members of the community to attend talks on abuse and letting them know help is available. Whenever I give a talk at a parish about abuse, about 10 or 11 women always come forward and tell me they've been looking for help but didn't know where to turn. Those are the women we need to reach."

Because family violence is such a volatile issue, most counselors agree that unless a pastor takes a lead, it is unlikely that the issue will receive attention at the parish level. But once a pastor makes any gesture that indicates his or her willingness to approach the problem, the first step might require community soul-searching on ways church teaching itself might be a contributing factor.

"There has been a lot of sexism in the development of Christianity," says Anderson. "The church fathers had a strict chain of command, and there are the various Old Testament passages on disciplining children. We now know that violence is more prone to happen in hierarchical families. We must begin to distinguish between the authentic gospel message and distortions of that message — to use Scripture as a resource, not as a club."

Beyond this there are some positive steps a parish can take to reduce the likelihood of family violence springing up in its midst. "The Catholic Church is in a very good position to address this issue because of the premarital courses offered through most parishes," says Dr. Strauss. "A huge contribution the church could make would be to explicitly include a frank discussion of this in such courses. I'd like to see some role-playing in which she wants something and he wants just the opposite. Conflict is inevitable in any relationship; resolving that conflict through hitting is not."

Finally, in home where violence has already taken root, the parish has ample opportunity to step in, says Fortune, "to offer comfort and support and perhaps physical safety to the victim and also to support the offender in seeking treatment. For if there is a change, if there is a desire on the batterer's part to stop the violence, to go into treatment — there's certainly a possibility of rebuilding a trust relationship."

"Not all churches need to open shelters. But they do need to educate themselves, to stop blaming victims, to refuse to be silent, to ask the question."

## APPENDIX E

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## State Coalitions

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### **NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

2401 Virginia Avenue, N.W., Suite 306  
Washington, D.C. 20037  
(202) 293-8860

### **ALABAMA**

Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
Safeplace, Inc.  
P.O. Box 10456  
Florence, AL 35631  
(205) 767-3076

### **ALASKA**

Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and  
Sexual Assault  
110 Seward Street, #13  
Juneau, AK 99801  
(907) 586-3650

### **ARIZONA**

Arizona Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
P.O. Box 27365  
Tempe, AZ 85282  
(602) 831-5022

### **ARKANSAS**

Arkansas Coalition Against Violence to Women  
and Children  
P.O. Box 807  
Harrison, AR 72601  
(501) 741-6167

### **CALIFORNIA**

Southern California Coalition on Battered Women  
P.O. Box 5036  
Santa Monica, CA 90405  
(213) 392-9874

Northern California Shelter Support Services  
P.O. Box 1955  
San Mateo, CA 94401  
(415) 342-0850

Central California Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
P.O. Box 3931  
Modesto, CA 95352  
(209) 575-7037

### **COLORADO**

Colorado Domestic Violence Coalition  
P.O. Box 18902  
Denver, CO 80218  
(303) 394-2810

### **CONNECTICUT**

Connecticut Task Force on Abused Women  
22 Maple Ave.  
Hartford, CT 06106  
(203) 524-5890

### **DELAWARE**

Delaware Domestic Violence Task Force  
Delaware Commission for Women  
Department of Community Education  
Carval State Building  
820 North French Street  
Wilmington, DE 19801  
(302) 571-2660

### **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

My Sister's Place  
P.O. Box 29596  
Washington, D.C. 20017-0796  
(202) 529-5991

### **FLORIDA**

Refuge Information Network of Florida  
c/o Women in Distress  
P.O. Box 676  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33302  
(305) 761-1133

Statewide toll-free hotline 1-800-342-9152

### **GEORGIA**

Georgia Network Against Domestic Violence  
P.O. Box 22487  
Savannah, GA 31403  
(912) 234-9999

### **HAWAII**

Hawaii State Committee For Battered Women  
P.O. Box 23269  
Honolulu, HI 96822

**IDAHO**

Idaho Council on Family Violence  
450 W. State Street  
Statehouse Mail, 10th Floor  
Boise, ID 83720  
(208) 334-2480

**ILLINOIS**

Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
937 South 4th Street  
Springfield, IL 62703  
(217) 789-2830

**INDIANA**

Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
104 1/2 W. Kirkwood Avenue #9  
Bloomington, IN 47401-3545

**IOWA**

Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
c/o Iowa Children & Family Services  
1101 Walnut  
Des Moines, IA 50309

**KANSAS**

Kansas Association of Domestic Violence Programs  
P.O. Box 4469  
Overland Park, KS 66204  
(913) 432-5158

**KENTUCKY**

Kentucky Domestic Violence Association  
Women's Crisis Center  
321 York St.  
Newport, KY 41071  
(606) 581-6282  
Statewide crisis line 502-581-7222

**LOUISIANA**

Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
Capital Area Family Intervention Center  
P.O. Box 2133  
Baton Rouge, LA 70821

**MAINE**

Maine Coalition for Family Crisis Services  
P.O. Box 304  
Augusta, ME 04861  
(207) 623-3569

**MARYLAND**

Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence  
YWCA Women's Center  
167 Duke of Gloucester St.  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**MASSACHUSETTS**

Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women's  
Service Groups  
25 West Street, 5th Floor  
Boston, MA 02111  
(617) 426-8492

**MICHIGAN**

Michigan Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
10435 Lincoln  
Huntington Woods, MI 48070  
(313) 547-1051

Statewide toll-free hotline 1-800-292-3925

**MINNESOTA**

Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women  
435 Aldine St.  
St. Paul, MN 55104  
(612) 646-6177

**MISSISSIPPI**

Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
P.O. Box 333  
Biloxi, MS 39533  
(601) 436-3809

**MISSOURI**

Missouri Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
c/o Women's Self Help Center  
2838 Olive  
St. Louis, MO 63103

**MONTANA**

Montana Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
P.O. Box 27  
Gilford, MT 59525

**NEBRASKA**

Nebraska Task Force on Domestic Violence and  
Sexual Assault  
YWCA  
222 South 29th St.  
Omaha, NE 68131  
(402) 345-6555

**NEVADA**

Nevada Network Against Domestic Violence  
680 Greenbrae Dr., #270  
Sparks, NV 89431  
(702) 358-4214

**NEW HAMPSHIRE**

New Hampshire Coalition Against Family Violence  
P.O. 353  
Concord, NH 03301  
(603) 224-8893

Statewide toll-free hotline 1-800-852-3311

**NEW JERSEY**

New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women  
206 West State St.  
Trenton, NJ 08608  
(609) 695-1758

Statewide Women's Referral Number 1-800-322-8092

**NEW MEXICO**

New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
The Women's Community Association  
P.O. Box 336  
Albuquerque, NM 87103

**NEW YORK**

New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
5 Neher St.  
Woodstock, NY 12498  
(914) 679-5231

Toll-Free Statewide Hotline 1-800-942-6906

**NORTH CAROLINA**

North Carolina Association of Domestic  
Violence Programs  
c/o High Point Women's Shelter  
P.O. Box 826  
High Point, NC 27261

**NORTH DAKOTA**

North Dakota Council on Abused Women Services  
State Networking Office  
311 Thayer, Room 127  
Bismark, ND 58501  
(701) 255-6240

Statewide toll-free hotline 1-800-472-2911

**OHIO**

Action for Battered Women in Ohio  
P.O. Box 15673  
Columbus, OH 43215  
(614) 221-1255

**OKLAHOMA**

Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
& Sexual Assault  
124 Colorado  
Woodward, OK 73801  
(405) 256-8712

Statewide hotline for information and referral  
1-800-522-7233

**OREGON**

Oregon Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Assault  
2336 S.E. Belmont St.  
Portland, OR 97214  
(503) 239-4486

**PENNSYLVANIA**

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
2250 Elmerton Ave.  
Harrisburg, PA 17110  
(717) 652-9571

**PUERTO RICO**

Battered Women's Shelter  
Casa Julia de Burgos  
P.O. Box 2433  
San Juan, Puerto Rico 00936  
(809) 781-2570

**RHODE ISLAND**

Rhode Island Council on Domestic Violence  
324 Broad Street  
Central Falls, RI 02863

**SOUTH CAROLINA**

South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
& Sexual Assault  
P.O. Box 7291  
Columbia, SC 29202  
(803) 765-9428

**SOUTH DAKOTA**

South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
Resource Center for Women  
317 S. Kline  
Aberdeen, SD 57401  
(605) 226-1212

**TENNESSEE**

Tennessee Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
P.O. Box 831  
Newport, TN 37821  
(615) 623-3125

**TEXAS**

Texas Council on Family Violence  
509-A West Lynn  
Austin, TX 78746  
(512) 482-8200

**UTAH**

Utah Domestic Violence Council  
C/O Division of Family Services  
150 West North Temple  
Salt Lake City, UT 84103  
(801) 355-2846

**VERMONT**

Contact for "The Burning Bed" is:  
(802) 775-3232 or 775-6788

**VIRGINIA**

Virginians Against Domestic Violence  
P.O. Box 5602  
Richmond, VA 23220

**WASHINGTON**

Washington State Shelter Network  
1063 S. Capital Way, #217  
Olympia, WA 98501  
(206) 753-4621

Statewide toll-free hotline 1-800-562-6025

**WEST VIRGINIA**

West Virginia Coalition Against DV  
Family Refuge Service  
P.O. Box 249  
Lewisburg, WV 24901  
(304) 645-6334

**WISCONSIN**

Wisconsin Coalition Against Woman Abuse  
1051 Williamson St. #202  
Madison, WI 53703  
(608) 255-0539

**WYOMING**

Wyoming Coalition on Family Violence &  
Sexual Assault  
P.O. Box 1127  
Riverton, WY 82501  
(307) 856-0942

Statewide toll-free hotline 1-800-442-0980

## Services Provided by Illinois Domestic Violence Programs

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ICADV domestic violence programs are shelter and walk-in centers which have specially trained staff and volunteer workers who both assist battered women and their children and advocate for them with other agencies that provide victim services. The full range of services provided to victims and Illinois communities include:

- 24-hour hotlines and crisis intervention services
- shelters and safe homes
- advocacy with the criminal justice, medical and social service systems
- individual and group counseling for victims and their children
- information and referral
- community education about domestic violence
- training programs about domestic violence for professionals and paraprofessionals
- program development to meet the needs of domestic violence victims from special populations including children, people of color, elderly and physically or developmentally disabled.

### COOK COUNTY PROGRAMS:

#### Chicago:

- \* Chicago Abused Women Coalition  
(312) 278-4566 (hotline)  
(312) 278-4110 (office)
- \* Family Rescue  
(312) 375-8400 (hotline)  
(312) 375-8401 (office)
- \* Rainbow House-Arco Iris  
(312) 521-4865 (hotline)  
(312) 521-5501 (office)
- \* Harriet Tubman Center for Battered Women  
(312) 924-3151 (hotline & office)
- \*\* Neopolitan Lighthouse  
(312) 638-0227 (hotline)  
(312) 638-0228 (office)

- \*\* Woman Abuse Action Project  
Uptown Hull House  
(312) 561-3500 (hotline & office - day)  
(312) 769-0205 (hotline & office - night/weekend)

#### Des Plaines:

- \*\* Life Span  
(312) 824-4454 (hotline)  
(312) 824-4457 (office)

#### Hazelcrest:

- \*\* South Suburban Family Shelter  
(312) 335-3028 (hotline)  
(312) 335-4125 (office)

#### Oak Park:

- \*\* Sarah's Inn  
(312) 386-4225 (hotline)  
(312) 386-3305 (office)

#### Summit:

- \* Constance Morris Home  
(312) 485-5254 (hotline)  
(312) 458-6920 (office)

#### Worth:

- \* Crisis Center for South Suburbia  
(312) 974-1791 (hotline)  
(312) 974-1091 (office)

### NORTHERN REGION PROGRAMS:

#### Aledo:

- \*\* Mercer County CADV  
(309) 582-7233 (hotline & office)

#### Aurora:

- \* Mutual Ground  
(312) 897-0080 (hotline)  
(312) 897-0084 (office)

**De Kalb:**

- \* Safe Passage  
(815) 756-2228 (hotline)  
(815) 756-5228 (office)

**Elgin:**

- \* Community Crisis Center  
(312) 697-2380 (hotline & office)

**Freeport:**

- \*\* YWCA  
(815) 235-9421 (hotline - day)  
(815) 233-4357 (hotline - night/weekend)  
(815) 235-1641 (office)

**Glen Ellyn:**

- \* Family Shelter Service  
(312) 469-5650 (hotline)  
(312) 469-5652 (office)

**Joliet:**

- \* Guardian Angel Home  
(815) 722-3344 (hotline)  
(815) 729-0930 (office)

**Kankakee:**

- \*\* Kankakee County Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
(815) 932-5800 (hotline)  
(815) 932-5814 (office)

**Princeton:**

- \*\* Quad Counties Counseling Center  
Freedom House  
(815) 875-8233 (hotline & office)  
(815) 699-7071 (office)

**Rochelle:**

- \*\* HOPE of Rochelle  
(815) 562-8890 (hotline)  
(815) 562-4323 (office)

**Rockford:**

- \* WAVE/PHASE  
(815) 962-6102 (hotline)  
(815) 962-0871 (office)

**Sterling:**

- \* Sterling-Rock Falls YWCA - COVE  
(815) 626-7277 (hotline)  
(815) 625-0343 (office)

**Streator:**

- \* Against Domestic Violence  
(800) 892-3375 (hotline)  
(800) 673-1555 (office)

**Waukegan:**

- \* A Safe Place Crisis Center  
(312) 249-4450 (hotline)  
(312) 249-5147 (office)

**Woodstock:**

- \*\* Turning Point  
(815) 338-8080 (hotline)  
(815) 338-8081 (office)

**CENTRAL REGION PROGRAMS:****Bloomington:**

- \* YWCA of McLean County  
Counseling Domestic & Sexual Violence  
(800) 322-5015 (hotline)  
(309) 827-4005 (hotline)  
(309) 662-0461 (office)

**Canton:**

- \*\* Fulton County Women's Crisis Service  
(309) 647-8311 (hotline & office)

**Charleston:**

- \*\* Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
(217) 345-4300 (hotline)  
(217) 235-4300 (hotline)  
(217) 348-5931 (office)

**Danville:**

- \* Danville YWCA  
A Woman's Alternative Shelter  
(217) 443-5566 (hotline & office)

**Decatur:**

- \* DOVE  
(217) 423-2238 (hotline)  
(217) 423-0960 (office)

**Jacksonville:**

- \*\* Women's Crisis Center  
(217) 243-4357 (hotline & office)

**Macomb:**

- \*\* Western IL Regional Council  
(309) 837-5555 (hotline)  
(309) 837-2997 (office)

**Peoria:**

- \* Tri-County WomenStrength  
(309) 691-4111 (hotline)  
(309) 691-0551 (office)

**Quincy:**

- \* Quincy Area Network Against Domestic Abuse  
(217) 222-2873 (hotline)  
(217) 222-3069 (office)

**Springfield:**

- \* Sojour Women's Center  
(217) 544-2484 (hotline)  
(217) 525-0371 (office)

**Urbana:**

- \* A Woman's Place  
(217) 384-4390 (hotline)  
(217) 384-4462 (office)

**SOUTHERN REGION PROGRAMS:****Alton:**

- \* Oasis Women's Center  
(618) 465-1978 (hotline & office)

**Belleville:**

- \* Women's Crisis Center  
(618) 235-0892 (hotline & office)

**Cairo:**

- \* Community Health Services  
Cairo Women's Shelter  
(618) 734-4357 (hotline)  
(618) 734-4200 (office)

**Carbondale:**

- \* Women's Center  
(618) 529-2324 (hotline & office)

**Centralia:**

- \*\* Call For Help/Women In Need  
(618) 533-7233 (hotline & office)

**Clay City:**

- \* Stopping Woman Abuse Now  
(618) 676-1911 (hotline & office)

**Harrisburg:**

- \*\* Anna Bixby Women's Center  
(618) 252-8389 (hotline)  
(618) 252-8380 (office)

- \* Shelter Services

- \*\* Walk-In Services with Safe Homes

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